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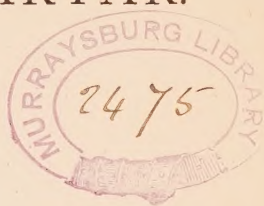
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CATCHING A TARTAR.

A Novel.



BY

G. WEBB APPLETON,

AUTHOR OF 'FROZEN HEARTS.'

'Sperate Miseri. Cavete Felices.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CATCHING A TARTAR.

PROLOGUE.

PERTH AMBOY was, in the year 1861—or, at least, until the guns of Sumpter in the spring awoke it from its lethargy—the sleepest and dullest town on the New Jersey coast. Built upon a strip of sandy beach at the mouth of the Raritan, where the land, sweeping in the shape of a crescent down to Sandy Hook, formed a broad and noble roadstead, while Staten Island—stretching a natural break-water for ten miles down to the Narrows in New York bay—held back the broad Atlantic swell from its wharves, the little town possessed advantages which more than justified its ancient rivalry with the now commercial metropolis of America.

In spite of its decadence, or rather, its non-

fulfilment of early promise, Perth Amboy boasted of ancient municipal rights, publicly elected its mayor, and by virtue of a certain inherited faith in its destiny, clung with much tenacity to formulas long since decreed to be in keeping with a realizable ideal of civic grandeur. It made no perceptible difference to its inhabitants that the first great hope of prosperity had not survived the pains of its long parturition. The deep sea-water upon which a navy might ride in safety was always there, and intermittent glimpses of a vessel at anchor in the offing feebly tended to keep up the delusion. It is a strong conviction with many of us that a man by nature tuneful should sing, though he has but the stars for an audience, and that the outcome of opportunity should be, more or less, effectual striving. But Perth Amboy, failing as yet to learn that there is nothing so difficult to out-live as the sloth bred of egotism, was fain, for many years before 1861, to accuse of treacherous vaticination the deep, green sea-water that lapped at its broken piers, and whispered all day long of the coming of mighty ships that never came : and there to let the matter rest.

There had been some sap and savour of

enterprise at one time, in the old formulas ; but now only their venerable husks remained. The town pump held its own upon the High Street—short-winded and wheezy, indeed, but an eminently respectable and conservative institution, defying time, stress of weather, and the spirit of modern innovation. The moon sufficed for street illumination, as it did in the days of the third George of blessed Tory memory ; and in the absence of a fire-engine, leathern water buckets dangled from hooks in the hall ceilings of the more pretentious mansions.

It is probable, whatever his opinion of the familiar oracle, the sea, might have been, that the Inspector of Customs of the little port must have been conscious of holding a sinecure in the *dolce far niente* sense. Such, indeed, was the torpor into which the town had fallen, that two banks, organised for the purpose of husbanding the fruits of its small activities, had actually perished of inanition. Still, everything about it, excepting its dulness and the quality of its oysters—in the propagation and culture of which many of its inhabitants were engaged—was unmistakably suggestive of its being a Micawber among towns, resignedly waiting, with its face seaward, for

the windfall which it was expected would one day be blown in upon it from that direction. This condition of things was somewhat grotesquely typified by an aerostatic monster reputed to be going through a tedious process of incubation within a huge shed at one extremity of the town, and which it was thought—by the inventor at least—would some day burst through the roof and go careering to the very zenith, a full-fledged terror to all the birds of the air.

But down by the water-side, with the pungent odour of seaweed in your nostrils, and your lungs expanding with the strong salt air, whatever feeble interest you might have felt in the great flying machine, or the benumbed condition of the town's industries, was quickly put to rout in the exhilaration of a new and healthful sensation. Right and left stretched a long reach of curved shore, steeped iron-grey to the centre with the ebb, it may be, and thence, to its outer rim, a dazzling whiteness of finest drifted sand and bleached oyster-shells, broken here and there by wooden piers or lines of bathing-houses, and gaily painted and tethered skiffs. Across the intervening mile of water called the Arthur Kull were the tufted hills of Staten

Island, ending abruptly in the middle of the bay on the right, where a dozen or more sloops of small tonnage often lay at anchor. Further on to the south, the Raritan—after flowing through long reaches of salt meadows, past innumerable brick-kilns and clay-pits—poured over a network of sand-bars into a wide expanse of sea-green water, staked off, as if it were a great marine cemetery, into square plots where oystermen sat in open skiffs and lowered their iron tongs into the beds of the succulent bivalves; while out from the river's mouth and across the bay came by day and night a line of barges and scows, laden to the very water's edge with coal and iron from the Pennsylvania mines, and tugged by towering 'propellers' of many horse power—an interminable procession creeping slowly past the venerable town, under the shadow of the Staten Island hills, and through the Arthur Kull, on its way to the great city a little further on.

A pleasant enough sight it was, to sit in mid-August on the mossy pier-head—where the steamer *Magenta*, in her trips to and from New Brunswick, at the head of the Raritan, touched twice a day—and watch the shiftings of the animated picture. You could

turn your back with complacency upon the moribund village, where the sun shone with blistering effect upon its straggling wooden houses, and which, with the reflected heat from sandy roads and a million efflorescent oyster-shells, made a noonday siesta a matter of downright necessity to its not unwilling inhabitants. If, in your case, the cool salt breeze, blowing under the rim of your straw hat, failed as an incentive to wakefulness, there were the softly lapping waves inviting you to a plunge from the pier-head ; or, again, you might chance to see the whole surface of the bay rippled by a 'school' of blue fish. At all events, there was the seduction of a beautiful grove upon the island, accessible by water, and usually filled with holiday-makers from New York, whose steamer lay, with pennons flying, at the little wharf beneath the hill.

Under all these circumstances, it may be easily conjectured that there were many people who found in Perth Amboy all that was necessary to make a summer sojourn agreeable, especially such as were fond of fishing and quiet sea-bathing, and who were not terrified by the presence of sharks and uncomfortable horned creatures of the crab species in the bay.

As a consequence of this, a number of beautiful villas had of late years sprung up along the lower beach, while upon the upland, behind the town, an old mansion—once the official residence of a Governor of New Jersey, and charmingly situated in a forest-glade—had been converted into an hotel, where many pleasant people were in the habit of spending the season. One of the most pretentious of the new villas, faced by a terraced-garden leading down to the shore, where a number of boats were always to be found chained to a stake, had been occupied for several years by a gentleman of reputed Southern birth and lineage named Charles Summerfield, and whose family, at the date of our story, consisted of a sickly and somewhat querulous wife—a native, it was believed, of France—and a daughter, Martha—now at school—about fourteen years of age. He was one of those tall, square-shouldered, big-chested men, tawny, blue-eyed and full-bearded, with the strength of a horse and the disposition of an angel (when the old Adam was not up in him, which was not often); a decidedly handsome fellow in the opinion of all the ladies, and a semi-savage in the eyes of all the small

men of the town. He was also believed to be possessed of considerable wealth; and, indeed, those presumably the best acquainted with his affairs, Messrs. Forbes & Co., the great New York bankers, had, upon one or two occasions where a question of credit had stimulated inquiry, made direct and positive asseverations to that effect. His dominant instinct led him to be much upon the water. He was bronzed by the sun, furrowed by the salt wind, and was as indifferent to storm as a sea-gull. In his wanderings, however, he had acquired an acquaintance with many lands and peoples, and beneath a somewhat rugged exterior he kept carefully concealed a knowledge of many gentle arts. He never felt it incumbent, for instance, to speak of a pleasant and honourable career at Harrow, and was equally reticent upon the subject of the Ireland scholarship which he carried away in his seventh term at Oxford, and of the first class he would have gained, but for a mishap in which a woman was chiefly concerned. It is probable that his most esoteric friend was unaware that he possessed a colloquial knowledge of French and Italian; and though, through being suspected by the resident clergy of a leaning toward the most

acute form of modern heresy, he had shown in more than one determined bout that he was anything but a tyro in polemical strife, the full extent of his acquirements was never so much as dimly guessed at by the good people of Perth Amboy.

He was popularly supposed to be a 'jolly dog,' more or less impregnated with his favourite element, and perversely attached to a certain Epicurean creed, in which fried beef-steaks were held to be an abomination, and dry champagne was esteemed above the universal Piper Heidsick. Such eccentricities, however, were clearly permissible in a 'jolly dog,' whose intellectual faculties were indisputably of a very low order indeed. It happened, though, that when his opinion upon a recondite question was demanded by some fledgling from Princeton, or the local grammar school, for purposes of general amusement, the effect of the answer, when given, was often such as to give the interlocutor and his audience an unwelcome sense of surprise.

Of his domestic relations but little was really known. Mrs. Summerfield was by no means of a companionable nature, and this, of course, frustrated private inquiry into the

matter. Though unable, through physical disability, to discharge her social duties to the satisfaction of over-critical neighbours, she gave an occasional entertainment to the better class of Perth Amboy society, over which she shed a rushlight influence, saying feeble things in a very pretty foreign accent, and winning, as a rule, the confidence of very young and inexperienced girls. Women who made it a point to peer keenly into their neighbours' affairs, and report visible flaws to sympathetic friends, were somewhat disappointed with the aspect of this decorous household. Mr. Summerfield, whose genial urbanity had made him a universal favourite, was unquestionably a constant, kind, and indulgent husband; probably, in the absence of visible flaws, his virtues were even supererogatory in this respect, for these good ladies were unanimous in one thing—that it was incumbent upon no man to over-indulge the whims and vagaries of a feeble and lachrymose wife. Such unanimity among ladies by no means destitute of personal gifts would seem to point to the absence in Mr. Summerfield of the usual masculine susceptibility to the fascination of a pretty face. Whether this was so or not,

Mr. Summerfield possessed a strong conviction that he loved his wife dearly, and was incapable of ever doing her a serious wrong. He entertained this good opinion of himself up to a certain period in the summer of 1861, when, under unexpected coercion—that of destiny perhaps—it would appear to have undergone an abrupt and startling change.

On the 5th of June of this year Mrs. Warren, of England, accompanied by her travelling companion, Lydia Parker, spinster, also of England, arrived at the Perth Amboy Hotel, and was installed in a suite of apartments looking seaward, and commanding, through a rift in a belt of gigantic elms, a distant view of the Summerfield villa.

A flutter of surprise and admiration went round the dining-tables that evening as she swept into the spacious room, apparently all unconscious of lifted eyebrows, scanning glances, and audible comments upon her person. Either from modesty, or from a conviction—the result of a more or less lengthy experience—that downcast eyes, especially when they are fringed by beautiful lashes, stimulate admiration and afford opportunity for *sotto voce* commendation, she maintained throughout the repast a de-

meanour free from any visible sign of self-consciousness. Later on in the evening, when most of the guests were assembled upon the broad verandah of the hotel, she came with her companion, and taking a seat in their midst, engaged in some desultory talk with those near her about the sea-bathing, the fishing, the impending civil war, and other topics upon which the changes could be safely rung. Tired of this, however, at last, and singling out a somewhat voluble youth of fifteen, who boasted of an intimate knowledge of all things connected with Perth Amboy and its people, she directed his attention to the noble avenue of elms, now steeped in moonlight and sweeping an unbroken wall of foliage down to the road, and so plainly intimated her desire to take a stroll in that direction, that with a great sense of importance he arose, and volunteered to escort her thither. She motioned to her companion, and the three, descending the steps, slowly walked in the shadow of the elms.

‘What a lovely place!’ she exclaimed at last. ‘It is more like the park of an English nobleman than the grounds of a summer hotel’—this with her head inclined toward Lydia Parker, who returned a very sibilant

‘Yes’m’—then, turning her eyes upon the youth, she added : ‘It is a thousand pities that Perth Amboy, with its beautiful surroundings, should be so hot and sandy and ugly. Do you not think so, Mr.——?’

Here followed a pause and a smile of interrogation.

‘Mr. Smythe,’ rejoined the youth, with a pleasant sense of breaking the ice, and of perceptibly gaining ground with his fair interlocutor.

‘S—m—y?’

He nodded affirmatively.

‘I have seen it spelt that way,’ she said ; ‘but I don’t really think it an improvement, do you?’

Mr. Smythe, vividly recalling the time when his father was known simply as Mr. Smith, smiled in a ghastly way, and contented himself with quoting the Trenton directory as a collateral authority upon the subject; where upon she smiled again in the most fascinating manner, and apologised for her rudeness, which caused him to protest with great warmth against her doing anything of the kind.

‘Pshaw! what do *I* care?’ he said; ‘I’d just as lieve be called Buzzard as not. I

know a girl named Buzzard, and she's *beautiful*! "What's in a name," isn't it? and there you are, you see—shall I catch that lightning-bug for you? it's a whopper!"

'Oh do, please.'

So Mr. Smythe darted off in pursuit of the living spark, which led him a zig-zag dance for a time, then plunged into the unshorn grass, and hid its lantern beneath its wings. But a mighty hunter of fireflies was after him. A straw hat came down like an extinguisher, and presto! he was transferred all in a twinkling to a prison of lace upon Mrs. Warren's bosom.

'It's beautiful,' she said. 'Thanks, very much.'

Whereupon Mr. Smythe, conscious of earning thanks by the sweat of his brow, proceeded to mop his face, and remarked:

'Moses! ain't it hot!'

They had reached the end of the path by this time, and stood by the open gates looking down the sandy road leading into the town.

'You have exerted yourself too much, I am afraid,' she answered. 'You may not be in the habit of doing it.'

'Oh, well! there!' Mr. Smythe thought

that *was* good, and was bounding off after another fire-fly, when she detained him. 'Why, it's only fun,' he explained; 'I sometimes catch a hundred of 'em in an evening. There isn't much else to do here.'

'That reminds me,' she said. 'How *do* people pass the time here, Mr. Smythe?'

'Well,' he answered, 'mostly flirting, I believe, and eating; and—oh, I say, do you have Spanish mackerel over in England?'

'What makes you think I am English?'

'Why,' he answered, with perfect frankness, 'I saw your name in the hotel register.'

'Oh, you did; well, I don't think we have Spanish mackerel in England, Mr. Smythe.'

'Then you'll have a treat, that's all; only,' he added, shaking his head very solemnly, 'they don't have them for dinner at the hotel half so often as I should like; and, let me see, there will be a ball, Friday night, and a band, and fireworks, and Chinese lanterns——'

'But,' she interposed, 'I did not speak particularly of the hotel. Is there nothing to see or do in the town?'

'Well,' he answered, 'I don't know; the mosquitoes, you see, are something dreadful when the wind blows off the salt-marshes, and the girls say it is the worst place for

freckles in New Jersey—but there are clam-bakes sometimes, and you can go out in a boat and eat oysters fresh from the water, and there are plenty of weak-fish in the bay, though toad-fish are *such* a drawback in fishing. You see, if you let your line touch bottom, they swallow hook, sinker and all, and as for their mouths, well!’ here he paused, and looked about him in search of a similitude; then, suddenly brightening up, ‘Have you ever seen Mr. Backus?’ he asked.

‘Never to my knowledge.’

‘Ah! that’s a pity,’ he replied, with a disappointed air. ‘He is the tambourine in the San Francisco minstrels; and if you had ever seen him laugh, it would help you very much to realise the size of a toad-fish’s mouth. You see, unless you have a spade or a rip-chisel or something like that in the boat, to dig out your hook and sinker with, you just have to give up fishing at once; it really is a very great drawback indeed.’

‘Well, what other resource is there, then?’

‘The bathing—that’s rather jolly.’

‘Well!’

‘And there are millions of huckleberries in the swamps back here; but, oh dear——!’

‘Oh dear what?’

‘The mosquitoes again; almost as big as sparrows, you know.’

‘This is quite a catalogue of horrors. Go on.’

‘And—let me see! there are the sharks—You have never caught a shark I suppose?’

‘I don’t recall the fact of my ever having done so—Why?’

‘Oh! because you can try your hand at it, if you like. It’s no end of fun—salt pork, the bait is—on a big hook—but then——’

‘But what?’

Mr. Smythe looked first at his own arm and then at hers.

‘Well, you see, it requires muscle for sport of that sort—and upon the whole it’s better adapted for us men—I really wouldn’t advise you to undertake it?’

Mrs. Warren laughed:

‘How proud you must be of your strength, Mr. Smythe.’

‘Oh! it’s nothing—and I never actually caught a shark myself. I know a man, though, who has caught eleven. That’s his villa over there where you see the light—Summerfield his name is.’

He saw neither the look of eager interest

that suddenly appeared in her face, nor the quick interchange of glances with her companion.

‘Summerfield!’ she repeated; ‘I once knew a gentleman of that name. What is he like?’

‘Oh! he’s a jolly old fellow; he owns the finest boats in Amboy, and he gives tiptop dinners, with lots of champagne. Such a whopping big man, with a muscle—well, there, I wouldn’t care about his hitting *me* more than once; I’d go all to pieces like a pane of glass with the first crack.’

‘Is he an American?’

Her voice had fallen, her manner had undergone a sudden change, her face had become deathly pale; and Mr. Smythe perceived it all in an instant. Said he:

‘What is the matter? Is he a friend of yours? He is an Englishman, I know, though everybody about here takes him for a ‘Southerner.’ Marty told me that——’

‘Marty! who is she?’

‘His daughter; and one of the nicest girls in the State of New Jersey, she is—you bet!—though——’ and Mr. Smythe paused.

‘Though what?’

‘Well, she is a *thundering* nice girl, but she’s awfully saucy, that’s all; and when she

has a real impudent spell on her, she just gives it to me *hot*. That's a very great drawback in any girl, I think.'

'Then he is married, this Mr. Summerfield?'

Mr. Smythe felt his tympanum tingle; his hearing apparatus was clearly out of order.

'What's that you said?' he demanded.

'I asked if Mr. Summerfield was married.'

'Yes, you asked that, of course—certainly; but I think I remarked, didn't I, that Marty was his daughter?'

'Well!'

'That's all. I say, that Marty's his daughter.'

'So he *is* married, then—*really* married?'

Mr. Smythe began to lose his temper. He was fifteen, and should not be trifled with in this way.

'I say, a joke's a joke, of course,' he said; 'but I shouldn't like you to poke fun at Marty. A cabbage hasn't a father and mother, I know; but a girl *always* has.'

Mrs. Warren exchanged a few words in a low tone with her companion, and then turned to him again with the inquiry:

'What is Mr. Summerfield's first name?'

'Charles.'

‘ And his wife—what is she ?’

‘ A French lady, I believe ; she says “ tink ” for think, and gargles all her r’s. She drinks O sookry, too ; and its nothing but sweetened water—faugh !’

Mrs. Warren was reflective again for several moments, then she asked :

‘ Are there other children ?’

‘ No.’

There was a still longer interval of silence, and then she said :

‘ There is a heavy dew to-night, Mr. Smythe ; had we not better return to the hotel ?’

Mr. Smythe evinced no especial degree of alacrity in assenting to the proposition, and even ventured to intimate that the dews were entirely innocuous in those parts ; but she was evidently difficult of reassurance upon the subject, and so, amid a silence broken now and then by some pleasant commonplace, they slowly retraced their steps to the hotel. Once upon the verandah, she extended her hand to Mr. Smythe, and thanked him in a tone audible to all present for his escort, which she claimed for the morrow again. Then, when Lydia had made her salutation, and had timidly accepted his proffered hand, the two—unconscious, it may be, that every

head turned, and every eye followed them as they went—entered the hotel and ascended to their apartments.

The landlord, when buttonholed by inquisitive gentlemen that evening, tersely said :

‘Gentlemen, I can only tell you what you have doubtless already learned from the hotel register—that she is Mrs. Warren of London, England.’

Mr. Smythe, with the disregard for euphemisms characteristic of his years and his people, told a friend confidentially the same evening that ‘she was the most stunning woman, by Ged! *he* had ever seen.’

What he would have thought had he encountered her, between two and three the following morning, closely veiled and hurrying through that same avenue of elms, which now was full of brooding shadows, with the silver of such few threads of moonlight as still lingered among the upper branches tarnished by the first breath of the morn—what he would have thought had he met her thus, is not difficult, I think, for us to imagine.

It is probable, however, that he would have reflected much upon the extraordinary degree of interest that obviously attached in her mind to the Summerfield villa.

Mr. Smythe's definition of her charms possessed the excellent quality of truthfulness, despite its coarseness. She was not pretty, she was not beautiful, she was even a shade sallow as to complexion; but she certainly was just what Mr. Smythe defined her to be. She impressed you first of all with a sense of strength—we were about to say virile strength—which, however, was as intangible as an odour; you could not detect it in the subtlest analysis of what, by word or deed, was made visible of her character. She was just enough above a medium stature to impart a degree of dignity to a supple and lissom form. It is probable that you would have noticed the poise of her head, the lustre of the dark, heavily-fringed eyes, and the rare beauty of her smile, and have taken no heed of the ophidian broadness of the cheek-bones, and the absence of the more delicate facial curves. Above all, you would have remarked, and doubtless approved the extreme, and it may be coquettish, simplicity of her dress. She rarely appeared except in black silk, which, it must be confessed, set off to marvellous advantage the rare perfection of her figure. She made an unobtrusive but effective use, at times, of some wonderful old

Pointe d'Angleterre, which was the envy of all the ladies in the hotel ; but, as a rule, she wore but little jewellery, and held in shuddering abhorrence the gairish neckties and flaunting ribbons so often affected by her countrywomen. Had Lydia Parker been closely questioned as to her mistress' special weaknesses, and been stimulated by some small gift to tell the exact truth upon the subject her enumeration, probably, would have comprised nothing beyond gloves, boots, and the best French stays. Hence her indulgence, perhaps, in a more or less complacent sense of being invulnerable to the keenest shafts of feminine criticism.

Had she been asked, say at the wicket of the confessional, to give a reason for occasional repining, she would have deemed it quite conclusive to mention the redundancy of her birthdays, now thirty-five in number. Still, there was left her the consolatory reflection that the most venomous of her critics, a cross-eyed miss of seventeen, who had bestowed her callow affections upon Mr. Smythe, somewhat contemptuously averred 'that Mrs. Warren was twenty-five if a day.'

That she aspired to the ephemeral distinc-

tion of leader in the little coterie at the hotel we do not believe, it being probable that she had quite different designs in forming one of that not over-brilliant company—but that, by some law of natural gravitation, she became its central figure and ornament, is nevertheless true. Whatever was positively angular in her nature was so skilfully hidden from view, and her passions, if any, were so well kept in leash, that the prevailing impression as to her extreme amiability was quite as justifiable as are the majority of our earliest opinions concerning the people of our acquaintance. Let it not be supposed, however, that her demeanour was charged, say to excess, with sedative and demulcent properties. Ladies were known to have an uneasy sense of being laughed at by her, in a perfectly well-bred and fascinating manner, and to indulge in a suspicion that beneath the pleasantest platitude—hidden as the drastic is by the sugar—the cruellest sneers were often lurking. In conversation with gentlemen she was indeed mainly aggressive, indulging in a vein of caustic rejoinder when flattery became sufficiently fulsome to endanger her reputation for good sense, or cutting with keen rapier-like thrusts into the thread of

pretentious utterances, whenever it appeared by the jaded countenances of listeners that a hearty laugh would be welcomed as a diversion. All of which was thought to be so very piquant and charming by thick-skinned and soft-hearted gentlemen, that more or less bickering on the part of the wives was shortly the outcome of it all. The most lynx-eyed, however, failed to detect the slightest breach of decorum in her intercourse with the other sex. She was destitute, in fact, of many of the weaknesses of her own sex. For anything approaching to maudlin sentiment she had a consistent horror; she frequently averred, indeed, that she preferred the '*Inferno*' to the sweetest idyl ever written.

It is to be feared that some unknown dynamic quality existed in her blood which might at some day assert itself with more or less violence, and that if the well-springs of her actions were carefully explored, certain unanalyzable and explosive ingredients might be found there to a very appreciable extent. Under these circumstances, a power of self-suppression which could survive the sting of that injury which women find it hardest to forgive is clearly entitled to a passing word of praise.

The ladies of the hotel having in a short time brought all the force of their united critical acumen to bear upon Mrs. Warren's demeanour, it resulted at last in the discovery that she was in assiduous pursuit of a husband. Though but little communicative as to her personal history and reminiscences, the presence of a plain gold ring and keeper upon the proper finger, and an occasional reference to poor Captain Warren, seemed to these good people unmistakable evidence of widowhood.

Thanks to the almost universal acceptance of this theory, her actions were closely watched, and it became a matter of speculation as to who would be the first to fall into the matrimonial trap. It was found to be a wholly untenable hypothesis, however, when it transpired that she had rejected two wealthy suitors in the course of a single week. To convince the remaining candidates, if any, of their ineligibility to a place in her affections, she surrounded herself, so to speak, thenceforth, with an atmosphere of freezing civility, from which she never emerged.

It was probably about this time that she met Mr. Summerfield. Just how and when their acquaintance came about, however, no

one could tell. It was suddenly perceived that they were very excellent friends, and when it was intimated by Mr. Smythe that they had known each other for many years, and, indeed, were compatriots, it seemed a reasonable enough supposition to obtain general credence.

It became obvious at once that a possibly coincident experience of European travel, and a common store of delightful accomplishments, were pleasant conditions in the renewal of an old friendship. Mr. Summerfield, too, being a stolid, unimpressible married man, the intimacy was stripped of any dangerous features it might have otherwise possessed. Indeed, had there been any remote suggestion of indecorum in these pleasant relations, it would have been neutralised at once by the knowledge that in her occasional fishing and sailing excursions upon the bay—in which Mrs. Summerfield's delicate health rarely permitted her to join—Mrs. Warren was never unaccompanied by her constant companion, Lydia Parker, who, in virtue of a somewhat conspicuous position in this narrative, merits at least a passing notice in the present chapter.

Lydia Parker, like her mistress, was of

English extraction, and had filled her present easy and lucrative position for a number of years. In person she was tall, gaunt, and angular, with yellow hair, thin, bloodless lips, a chalky complexion, and restless eyes of faded blue, nearly destitute of lashes, and entirely so of expression. She cultivated demureness in her mistress' presence, but *had* been known to ogle elderly gentlemen on the sly—indeed, she had once or twice been seen walking in a neighbouring grove with a foreigner, whose appearance excited no little amount of unfavourable comment at the time. Indecorum, however, never went further with her than this. Of her mental gifts little could be said. As a satellite of her mistress, she had naturally absorbed from the latter some mild rays of wisdom, and, in a long course of travel, had certainly acquired a dangerous assortment of smatterings, which she prudently kept, as a rule, for the delectation of *very* ignorant people. Mrs. Warren, possessing no knowledge of her antecedents, had taken her for a companion, and made her the repository of her secrets. Whether or not this was a justifiable confidence it is too early in this year 1861 fully to determine.

It is just probable that the progress of this

intimacy would have been more narrowly watched but for the wild ferment of war which was then shaking the country and distracting all minds. With alarm-bells ringing, with church doors thrown open wide for public meetings, for lint-scraping, for the fabrication of soldiers' flannel coats and trousers, and other purposes requiring that altars should be draped in the 'stars and stripes;' with troop-laden trains thundering by night and day through villages hoarse with patriotic shouting; with newspapers dropping everywhere like firebrands into combustible places; with loyal blood everywhere simmering, and the tocsin cry of 'On to Richmond!' madly dinning in all ears—amid the universal bedlam, how was it possible that the sailings of three people upon the green sea-water at Perth Amboy should possess the slightest degree of interest to anyone but themselves?

Mr. Summerfield's indifference to the stirring scenes about him, providing he were in reality a 'Southerner,' as affirmed of him, excited at first some amount of feeble comment, which, however, quickly died away; and at last the coming and going of the gaily-painted skiff, with the dark-eyed woman always seated beside the tiller,

ceased even to be an object for curious eyes to linger upon.

At last the day arrived when it was determined by Mr. Summerfield to test the sailing capacities of the *Flora* a light sloop-rigged craft, of a somewhat novel construction, in the success of which he manifested an unusual degree of interest. As his daughter Martha was to return from school the following day, it was proposed, in the event of a satisfactory trial, then to make a circuit of the entire bay, and, if possible, to induce Mrs. Summerfield to be one of the party.

About noon they got fairly under way; and it may be that the indications of a thunder-shower in the sky, and the rapid falling of the barometer, caused them all to wear somewhat anxious faces as they left the shore. However that may have been, there seemed to be no faltering in their determination; and, the sail bellying out in the wind, the craft careened over on its side, and with a slight creaming about the prow, darted in good style down the Arthur Kull.

Scarcely were they out of sight, when the tall hemlocks began to rock ominously upon the Staten Island hills, and inky shadows gathered quickly in the water below. Fishing-

boats came skimming in like frightened sea-birds ; the whole surface of the bay became wrinkled in an instant ; little curling waves crept up and beat against the wooden piers ; down in the open, stinging salt spray leaped into the faces of the oystermen as they tugged at the bending oars ; black flaws of wind came in steady pulsations from over the darkened hills ; breakers could be seen at last, tearing at the rocks at the end of the island ; propellers came screaming, under a full head of steam, to get into shelter ; down below, near the mouth of the Raritan, and plunging through the simmering water, was the *Magenta*, visible with her paddle-wheels flecked with foam an instant, then blurred in dense, slanting lines of rain. Then the black clouds fell like a lid upon the town ; a water-spout seemed suddenly to have burst into the streets, and with every flash of lightning the boiling sea shone like molten silver, and vessels, staggering with drenched sails in the gale, leaped up an instant and disappeared in the closing darkness of rain. For an hour the storm lasted. When it cleared away, it was found that chimneys had been cast down, and great trees snapped off at their base. One house was unroofed. Never in the

memory of the oldest inhabitants had Perth Amboy been visited by such a tempest.

Poor Mrs. Summerfield, as she lay on her couch, propped up by pillows, was filled with the direst misgivings. When Martha, having meditated a surprise, arrived, drenched to the skin from the landing-place of the steamboat, her mother embraced her tenderly, and with tears streaming down her blanched face, said :

‘ My child, I somehow feel that your father to-day will be lost to us for ever.’

Her fears were abundantly confirmed.

That night the *Flora* was found drifting bottom upwards in the Arthur Kull. A shiver went through the little town. People gathered in knots at the street corners, and discussed the terrible event. The Baptist minister—mindful at the evening prayer-meeting of his one great opportunity, and burning to acquit himself in the distinctively American art of planting hell-fire and reaping increased pew-rents—sent his youngest auditors home with an unmistakable smell of brimstone in their nostrils, and straightway sowed the seeds of a great revival. Admirers of Mrs. Warren solemnly wagged their heads and refused to be comforted. In the bar-

room of the ' Bull's Head ' an animated discussion arose as to the probable amount of reward that would be offered for the recovery of the bodies, and it was darkly hinted that Bill Hullfish, the oysterman, who first discovered the *Flora*, could tell something more about them than it had yet suited his purpose to do.

Morning dawned. News of a \$100 reward was bruited about. Skiffs were ploughing the Arthur Kull in every direction. Some had been at it all night, beneath the light of a ghastly moon. Flotsam of a curious nature was now and then hooked up on stout trolling lines; and again and again, as the ropes grew taut, blanched faces and beating hearts hung over the dark water, as it was expected that a dead woman would at last come slowly rising to the surface. Strange creatures hovered along the shore, and fastened hungry eyes upon every piece of jetsam that mounted the curling waves, and came swirling in upon the sand. Anxious watchers there were everywhere, who, when the sun went down fiery and red at last, had watched in vain. Another morning, with a sky of brass and a sirocco breeze like the blast of a furnace blowing off the land; a hundred skiffs abroad again upon

the dazzling waters, and sharp eyes everywhere on the alert, lest in the reflux of some strong tide the bodies should be carried out to sea, and the tempting reward for ever lost.

Thus, day after day, until the quest was abandoned in despair. Summer deepened into autumn; autumn chilled into winter; gales beat phrenzied upon the coast; the troubled sea disgorged many a strange weird shape before the crocus dawn of another spring; but the dead of which we have written it never yielded up.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING THE DEADWICK BREWER.

JOHN BROPHY, of Deadwick, Stubbleshire, possessed a gratifying sense, when not in Mrs. Brophy's presence, of somehow being the centre of the solar system. He knew very little about the solar system, it is true, and it perhaps had never occurred to him that daylight in Deadwick might be the result of the unconscious exercise of his light-giving capacity ; but that he had incontestably obtained the upper hand of the universe was his firm conviction nevertheless. He was a brewer, whose fortunes, from a barren zero, had mounted, by favouring circumstances, to that degree of affluence indicated by the possession of a cheque-book, and an acre or two of land with valuable messuages. This creditable achievement, despite his total ignorance of Greek roots and his perverse use of the

local vernacular—caused John Brophy to be a power in Deadwick. Not that the power was in any wise excessive, such as might under suitable provocation lead to the subversion of the British Constitution, for example; for you must know that Deadwick—with its poor thatched cottages strung like dingy beads upon a single thread of flinty road trending northward from a market-town, whose steeples were visible in the near distance, and whose bells regulated all the cottage clocks—was but an insignificant village, not yet risen to the dignity of a place in the P.O. directory. On one side of the road crept a tawny, pike-infested stream, fringed with pollard willows; which rose with every heavy downfall of rain, and made of the contiguous meadows a vast lake in the summer-time, and a mass of sheeted ice, like steel, when the hard grip of the frost fell upon it in mid-winter. The village, standing out of the reach of inundation upon a sort of natural causeway, was indisputably the sleepest place in all Stubbleshire. Analysis of its atmosphere would have disclosed certain mild anæsthetic properties, we are sure—traceable, perhaps, to the brewery, which was the head and centre of Deadwick's feeble activities. A

grave-sprinkled barrow at one end of the village was crowned with a modest little church, quite hoary with lichen, while near it stood an ancient manor-house long since fallen into decay, with a line of circumvallating hayricks and cow-sheds, and a dismal clump of *ilexes* in the forecourt. These, with the brewery, constituted the only variations from the prevailing monotony of yellow cottages ; and though a solitary fisherman ventured into this drowsy region at times to troll for pike in the stream, and a skating party from the neighbouring town at rare intervals awoke Deadwick from its slumbers, these incursions were so infrequent as to raise but transient ripples upon the placid life-currents of the little village.

John Brophy possessed a legitimate claim to self-consciousness, in virtue of having accomplished the difficult feat of extracting blood from a turnip. In other words, amid the general somnolence of Deadwick, he had found both sustenance and profit. He was forty years of age at the period of our story—a stalwart, well-proportioned, burly fellow, with a face of bronze, through which surged a tide of rich warm southern, and mayhap gipsy, blood ; a close, compact beard, wiry in

texture, and of inky blackness; eyes like sloes as to colour, while thirty-two perfectly sound and white teeth were the visible accompaniment of a laugh quite stentorian in volume and quantity. Self-sufficiency pervaded him—say, like a gentle thirst; a quality made manifest in the uniform composure of his features, in the blandness of his smile as he surveyed the long lines of frothing beer barrels in his cellar, in his sidelong swinging gait as he sauntered about the brewery-yard, in the sturdy planting of his legs in the open gateway, ready to be stared at and looked up to by all comers as the centre of the solar system, in the loud smack of approval, quite like a concussion, which he invariably gave over his own brewed, and finally, in the lusty way he had of speaking of his success to strangers.

‘No, sir; I hadna’ a farthing i’ the beginning; I’ve made it all mysen; an’ if you donna b’lieve it, ask the missis now, an’ she’ll tell you the same.’ This was John’s invariable commentary upon his good fortune.

The ‘missis’ was by nature a thin, acrid piece of humanity, who had fastened herself, barnacle-like, upon John in the thirty-seventh year of his bachelorhood. She might at

that time have been fresher, younger, and fairer. There might have been less uncertainty about her family and her own antecedents, much less that was equivocal about her in many ways. So John thought long afterwards when it was too late, but the poor fellow—and it was strange, too, in one of his degree—was caught by the flimsiest bait imaginable. Illiterate and boorish himself, it occurred to him that his commercial success in the world could not be more appropriately rounded off than by marrying a woman who would impart to his domestic properties a spice of the refinement and gentility he felt to be so necessary to social preferment. In cutting loose from his bachelor moorings, he determined, in fact, to profit by the sad example of Mr. Tompkins, the Limeborough corn-factor, who married his cook upon his retirement from business, and came, socially speaking, to immediate grief in consequence. Limeborough society, conceding that she was a ‘good sort of person,’ might have ignored Mrs. Tompkins’ culinary past, had it not transpired, unfortunately, that she spelt her name with a Greek cross—a discovery, which, in destroying for ever Mr. Tompkins’ chance of becoming a churchwarden, proved

quite a shattering blow to that most estimable man. Now, Mrs. Brophy was a very different sort of woman. She could not only write her name in a beautiful round hand, and repeat 'no end o' poetry all out o' her own head,' but she was capable, to John's astonishment, of crossing the borders of the English tongue, and making wonderful excursions among strange verbs and participles. As travelling-companion to a lady of literary and nomadic tendencies, she had, of a necessity, seen much of the world, and had acquired such superficial accomplishments, linguistic and otherwise, as in travelling we catch unconsciously, as we would a cold, and therefore lightly esteem, but which, to the bucolic mind, seem the result of some mysterious and wonderful endowment.

Her store of refined knowledge, therefore, was quite sufficient to bedazzle Mr. Brophy's reason, and give a strange obliquity to his habitually sturdy common sense. He found the conjugation of a French irregular verb to be quite an exhilarating business, and discovered great potency in a German version of the Lord's Prayer, though he was a little troubled by the reflection that possibly English was not as universally understood in

Heaven as he had hitherto imagined. Thanks, too, to her, he soon found himself gaining a knowledge of foreign countries which enabled him to speak in condemnatory terms of the German beer. The upshot of it all was that when he found this *vade mecum* of useful knowledge could be secured for the asking, he embraced the opportunity with characteristic business-like promptitude. They were married in the year 1864, and for some time afterwards it made him quite giddy to think of his new acquisition, and of the family tree that might be developed from such a genuine sprig of gentility. She brought to him—it was, with the exception of £200 in the Three per Cents., her only dowry—a brick from Cicero's villa at Tusculum, a branch of laurel from Virgil's apocryphal tomb at Posilippo, and various other objects charged with occult and incomprehensible virtues, which John regarded with almost fetichistic reverence and superstition.

It will thus be seen that marriage brought no sensible diminution of the awe and respect which her attainments had previously inspired in him. He found it quite useless, in momentary fits of acerbity, to argue with her upon any contested point of domestic manage-

ment; he was stricken helpless at once by a shred of Latin doggerel, or whatever other dialectic missile her facile tongue could seize upon, and hurl at his unreceptive head. This was a little surprising. His fourteen stone, which it had hitherto appeared to him should play a conspicuous part in the adjustment of family disputes, suddenly seemed to be of no account at all.

‘By what I can make out, ’tis th’ insides o’ us, an’ how them insides is put together. Surely that’s what ’tis. For knowin’ o’ the time, a little watch’s as good as clock i’ the steeple,’ he said, after much reflection upon the subject.

He walked up the church aisle on a Sunday with a sense of importance, as if he had a volume of Hebrew or a Greek lexicon under his arm, with which he could even floor the rector, were the latter’s pretensions ever to get to the pitch of requiring to be summarily put down.

Unfortunately, the family tree, upon the vigorous growth of which John had based some golden expectations, refused to put forth a single shoot. Three years’ solicitude upon the subject had given his reflections a certain tinge of scepticism at last. Mrs.

Brophy was fastidious upon so many points, however, that it may be she considered it rather a coarse business—this of propagating family trees. But if she *did* entertain such a conviction, she carefully abstained at least from communicating her thoughts to Mr. Brophy.

One thing she did attempt to do, however; she tried with all her dilettante soul to rub down and efface the more conspicuously ugly excrescences of his nature—and miserably failed. She besought him, ineffectually, to remodel his grammar, and even essayed to impart to his demeanour a shade of that Gallic refinement she so persistently affected. But John's ponderous insularity was proof against any such form of proselytism as this. He saw no good in people who preferred sour wine to beer, and ate snails. He was English bred and born, thank God! and his father before him; and he got his living by the honest sweat of his brow, and not by selling naked heathen images and going about the streets with monkeys and barrel-organs, as he knew from the evidence of his very own eyes foreigners mostly did. She was equally unsuccessful in her insidious attempts to wean him from

clay-pipes, and no more fortunate in endeavouring to divert him from the disgusting habit of wringing the fowls' necks and sticking his own pigs ; for John, after all, you see, was a knotted and gnarled piece of humanity, and as we well know, when the grain of the wood is definitely crooked, no power on earth can bend it straight again. Mrs. Brophy did not descend to the low and boisterous arts of a termagant and scold in her endeavour to effect these reforms ; her remonstrances to the contrary were blandly uttered, and were for the most part mildly tentative in their nature. In this we must concede to her the possession of much tact and great power of self-suppression ; for in the first ebullition of a naturally shrewish temper, she would have been speedily overwhelmed by the rude vigour of her husband's will when opposed to something he could clearly comprehend. Cowed and held in subjection, however, by the sustained force of her early influence, he was led in most things, as some of us are by the mere thread of an early habit or tradition, into a habit of passive acquiescence in such of her wishes as did not involve the subjugation of any of his purely animal instincts.

This strangely assorted couple lived, not inharmoniously, you perceive, about midway between Deadwick and Limeborough, the market-town, in a modern brick house with bay windows, and surrounded by a well-kept garden, into which we shall take the liberty later on of introducing the reader.

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING HOW JOHN BROPHY'S HALF-CROWN
BORE FRUIT AT LAST.

THE Deadwick Brewery was a rambling, disjointed affair, devoid even of the merit of being picturesquely shabby in appearance. As you entered the open gateway from the road, you were first confronted and carefully scrutinised by a bull-dog, with something of a prize-fighter's expression in his face, who, the examination proving satisfactory, permitted you to pass into a quadrangular court, garnished with a pump, a semicircle of chicken-coops, and a long line of empty barrels. Looking to the right, you found an immediate verification of the, as yet, prevailing odour, in a row of stables. At a right angle with these, at the bottom of the yard, extended a low building, containing the beer-vats, and exhaling, when approached, an

unmistakable aroma of hops. Beneath was the cellar, where the progress of fermentation went ceaselessly on ; while to the left, on a parallel line with the stables, stood the malt-house, kiln, and furnace-room. Returning to the road again, you found a low one-story building, fulfilling the double purpose of office and harness-room ; and a small thatched cottage which, being an original appendage of the brewery, had served for many years as the official residence, so to speak, of the brewer himself. Subsequently to his marriage, however, with the exception of brief intervals of occupation arising from business exigencies, the cottage remained wholly untenanted. This absolute condition of unproductiveness was, however, at direct variance with John's notions of thrift. He stood it for a year or two ; then he began to cast about him for a means of converting this somewhat shabby possession into a source of revenue. He reflected long and often upon the perplexing question, and, as in the case of most hard thinkers, he had his reward at last in a very luminous and promising idea. Now, John believed in many things, notably in the power of the 'evil eye' and the dire influence exerted by the moon

and stars upon human affairs ; but until now, his faith in newspaper advertisements had stood all the year round at uniform zero. The luminous idea, in short, sent this faith up to a degree that permitted him, upon the occasion of his very next visit to London, to call at the office of the *Morning Stentor* where, by the aid of an obliging and highly imaginative young clerk, an advertisement was concocted, setting forth the advantages as to salubrity, retirement, and general picturesqueness of a furnished cottage in Deadwick, Stubbleshire, which was to be let, on favourable terms, by Mr. John Brophy, brewer.

A P.S. embellished with three exclamation points, calling attention to the ‘splendid fishing in the neighbourhood,’ was the complementary feature of this pleasant fiction, which was published to the world the following morning, at the cost, to the Deadwick brewer, of one half-crown.

This was in Midsummer. The tax-gatherer made his usual rounds in Deadwick. The Limeborough bells continued their pleasant function of regulating the cottage clocks. In the absence of the eloquent rector, a feeble-minded curate, treading august paths, came

fishing and preaching; and the little church fell straightway into a state of atrophy. Mrs. Brophy had company in the yellow brick house. The brewery went on fulfilling its small part in the round of worldly activities. A few strangers came now and then, attracted by tales of patriarchal pike to be found among the flags and the rushes by the river side. At last, the river rose, and the meadows became flooded, and the willows presented for a time the awkward appearance of wading knee-deep in the turbid waters. Then a drought set in; the grass turned yellow, and the river, settling down day by day, was nearly soaked up in its spongy bed, and the very sedge became thirsty and parched. The weeks, passing swiftly by, brought on the equinoctial storms, when the waters rose once more, and the road was filled with muddy pools, and the naked pollards assumed the guise of Medusa heads. Nipping frosts came at last, with leaden noons, and bits of brown meadow and ice-rimmed water visible everywhere through the interlacing dry twigs of the hedge-rows. And through it all, John Brophy waited—not without impatience—for his half-crown to bear the expected fruit, and waited in vain.

This unlooked-for upshot of what, after all, was but a very trivial matter, nettled him beyond all measure ; and, by degrees, a conviction crept into his heart that the London newspaper had feloniously appropriated his half-crown, and the bland young man in the office, for whom he had at first entertained a high opinion, was systematically guilty of obtaining money under false pretences.

John continued in this belief until five o'clock one evening in early December, when it underwent a sudden and startling change. He was preparing to leave the brewery. The horses had been fed under his personal supervision, and the key of the stables was still vibrating upon its proper peg in the harness-room. His grand vizier—a little, wizened, old man, and a high authority in the matter of ' worts '—had locked the door of the shed containing the vats. John himself had mounted to the malt-room, where the barley was germinating with all desirable vigour ; then, peeping an instant into the kiln, had descended to the furnace-room below, adjusted the fire, and cast an approving glance at the string of hams and flitches suspended from the beams ; then, fastening the door by a hasp, had crossed the yard, closed the office, spoken

a final word to the bull-dog, and was in the act of inserting the key in the padlock of the gate, when he saw in the near distance two women approaching, who appeared to be attentively examining the houses as they passed.

Prompted perhaps by curiosity, perhaps by the fact that one of the women, as well as he could determine by the fading light, was excessively pretty, he manifested a disposition to linger over the task of fastening the gate. Probably, had Mrs. Brophy been present, he would have evinced a greater degree of alacrity. As it was, John, finding it consistent with the practice of the domestic virtues to admire a pretty woman, was resolved to make the best of his opportunity, so that he was an unconscionably long time in accomplishing his task, and was tugging away in a seemingly irascible mood at the lock, when the pretty woman stepped up to him, and said :

‘Are you acquainted, sir, with Mr. John Brophy?’

‘Ay, miss,’ said John with a full flush of self-consciousness; ‘oh ay, I am.’

‘He lives at Deadwick, of course.’

‘Oh ay, he does.’

‘Where, at the present moment, do you think he could be found?’

‘Well, miss, he ain’t so very far off, for, begging *your* pardon, *I’m* Mr. Brophy,’ and John displayed all his teeth and went to the length of touching his hat.

The young lady smiled in turn, and said :

‘Oh, indeed!’

John nodded vigorously.

‘Well, if I am not mistaken, you advertised some months ago that you had a furnished cottage to let.’

John’s heart fairly stood still.

‘I did; ay, I did,’ he said, all in a pant of astonishment.

‘A beautiful cottage,’ she went on, ‘surrounded by picturesque scenery, was it not?’ and she gave a look at her dismal environment in which, to say the least, there was no visible sign of enthusiasm.

John smiled uneasily, and was about to say something about the young man in the newspaper office, when, cutting his answer short, she asked :

‘Is the cottage still to let?’

‘Oh dear yes.’ John was very emphatic upon that point.

‘ You may show it to me then, if you please, Mr. Brophy.’

So he stepped into the middle of the road, and with a somewhat rueful visage, designated by a gesture the piebald structure adjoining the office.

She gave it a hasty glance, and then, facing sharply round to John, said :

‘ Are you anything of a poet, Mr. Brophy ?’

‘ Oh no ! I’m in the brewin’ business myself,’ he promptly answered—adding, after a moment, ‘ sin’ fifteen year, miss.’

‘ Yes, I comprehend now,’ she replied ; ‘ beer is frequently the source of poetic inspiration, is it not ?’

John, accustomed to walking up the church aisle once a week with unabridged Hebrew under his arm, was not to be put down thus by a hard word.

‘ Ay, ’tis,’ he answered ; ‘ I’ve heared them as know say the same thing. Beer’s at the bottom o’ most things i’ this country, thank God.’

‘ I say a fervent amen to it in the present instance,’ she replied with a laugh. ‘ Now let me go over the cottage, if you please, Mr. Brophy.’

He unfastened the gate with surprising

ease, considering the previous difficulty he had had with the lock, and soon reappeared with a key in his hand. Standing aside as the two women entered the cottage, he had a favourable opportunity of surveying the one who had hitherto remained silent, and who was obviously a servant or companion of the other ; a mulattress, with *café-au-lait* complexion, a mere dab of a nose, a low forehead, crinkly hair, and a submissive manner—the inheritance of a bondwoman to whom manumission was, as yet, but a vaguely comprehended term.

The cottage was a poor damp affair, with limp and bladdery paper upon the walls, and a general tendency toward rot and disintegration. There were but two rooms below, one of which served as kitchen ; while above, two low-ceiled chambers, fit only for the occupation of dwarfs, with windows so near the floor that a recumbent position was the alternative to tearing off the roof whenever a view of the stars or the condition of the weather was desired, were little suggestive of luxury or bodily comfort. A broad sneer was upon the stranger's face, when she asked at length :

‘ How much a week, Mr. Brophy, do you

consider this picturesque cottage to be worth ?'

John rallied in an instant. What was practical in him, being his most buoyant quality, came at once to the surface of his mind. Had sentiment by any chance ever found a lodgment in some empty crevice of his brain, it would have led a precarious existence, and found scant nutriment, we are afraid, in that arid home of beer and barley erudition.

'Ten shillings a week,' was his prompt rejoinder.

'I will take it then for three months,' she said, feeling for her purse; 'and as I desire immediate possession, I will pay you in advance.' With this, she extended a ten-pound note, which John immediately seized, and added :

'References in such a case, I suppose, are not required ?'

John became at once a picture of mental distress.

'Well you see, miss,' he began, 'you want it for yourself ?'

'And my servant—yes.'

'And you both be women ?'

'Presumably. I suspect that we have that appearance, at least.'

‘Ay, that’s just it!’ he said, scratching his chin with an air of perplexity.

‘That is what! Come, Mr. Brophy, do you require a reference? Yes or no?’

A pair of steady brown eyes were now fixed on his, in a way to make him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

‘Well, it’s only this,’ he said, in an apologetic tone, ‘there is the missis, an’ she’s a bit queerish, though she be a clever ’un, and do know a sight of French and Italian.’

He hoped that the rough edge of his objection might be taken off by this explanation. He felt, however, an uneasy sense of having signally failed in his object, when her answer came.

‘I see,’ she replied. ‘The moralities here are in Mrs. Brophy’s keeping, and she does not intend that Phryne and Laïs shall come and spread their nets for the gilded youth of Deadwick.’

He did not know what it all meant; but he judged by her display of colour that his reference to Mrs. Brophy had been unfortunate in its result. He was greatly reassured therefore (for he had not relinquished his hold upon the ten-pound note) when she added :

‘Give me a pen, then, and you shall have a reference. It certainly would be wrong to give an exemplary woman like Mrs. Brophy any cause for uneasiness.’

To discharge this important formality, it was necessary to enter the office ; and, indeed, in view of the faded condition of daylight, to light a candle in that somewhat musty sanctum. The commingled odours of shag tobacco, leather, and wagon-grease, apparently had no deterrent effect upon her purpose. As she crossed the threshold she gave a hasty glance at the unwashed tumblers and other items of the general disorder about her ; then John removed a set of harness from a chair, and, in dusting it, apologised for the smell of tobacco, remarking that ‘the missis she do object to it awful.’ Then he pulled forth a big but somewhat arid ink-bottle, wiped a pen several times upon his head, picked a hair out of the nib, and after some deep-sea fishing in the bottle, at length presented the moistened goose-quill to his charming visitor.

She stepped up to the desk, and he made place for her by pushing away some samples of barley ; then, looking over her shoulder, he saw her write :

‘ Henry Palmer, Solicitor, 101, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London.’

She handed this to him with a smile, and said :

‘ Now that the proprieties have been observed, oblige me with a receipt—a written agreement that I may have the cottage for an additional three months if I should wish it—and the change of my ten-pound note, if you please.’

John immediately took out a sheet of paper, blew the dust from it, and by dint of much contortion of his facial muscles—for John was not deep in the caligraphic art—got down the date, and a broad ‘ Received from ’—here he paused, dropped his pen, and looked up.

‘ You didna’ tell me the name,’ he said, with the air of a man who has made a startling discovery.

‘ Mary Somers,’ she replied.

‘ *Mrs.* Mary Somers ?’

She frowned.

‘ Mary Somers, I said.’

He looked askance at her left hand ; a gem flashed upon one of the fingers, but no circle of plain gold was there to justify the use of ‘ *Mrs.* ’ ; so after much mental exer-

tion and a prolonged hunt for a receipt-stamp, John gave hand and seal to a paper of tremendous import, could he only have known it.

But for a watery moon that hung cold and wan midway between the Limeborough steeples, it would have been quite dark, when—all formalities having been at length arranged—they again stood in the village street.

‘And now, Mr. Brophy,’ said the new tenant, gathering her furs tightly about her, ‘shall we be obliged to return to Limeborough this evening? or do you know of some place in the neighbourhood where we can find shelter for the night?’

John, thinking this might be a hint for an invitation to the Brophy fireside, felt it immediately incumbent upon himself to say:

‘Ah! o’ course; if the missis weren’t so queer, now——’

‘My good man!’ exclaimed Miss Somers with strange vehemence, ‘what in the world are you talking about? Are there no inns in Deadwick?’

He shook his head.

‘No, no,’ he said; ‘but there’s a farmhouse beside the river, where I’ve known gentlemen to bide a week or more at a time when fishing in these parts, an’ a clean an’

tidy eno' place 'tis, too, if they can accommodate you.'

'Oh! thanks so much, if you'll be good enough to lead the way.'

'Wi' pleasure, miss; 'tis but a step through the lane yonder; an' 'twere well, too, I said a word o' introduction like, myself, to the gells, for, you see, the mother, poor woman! is abed wi' a twisted spine, by what I can make out, sin' two year come next Lady-day; an' the gells might not like to take it upo' theirselves, don't you see.'

By this time they had entered a narrow path bordered by hedge-rows; and a few minutes' walk brought them to a low building, surrounded by hay-ricks and pollards, close behind which, visible through a tangle of dry twigs, wound a ribbon of steel-grey water. An intermittent gleam, as of a coal fire, flickered in one of the windows. John, with a simple 'this way, miss,' pushed open the door, groped his way through the hall, and in a second reappeared with two buxom, red-cheeked girls, one of whom, holding a candle in her hand, invited the strangers into the kitchen, where a fire of cobbles was burning brightly upon the hearth. The new tenant glanced about her, at the well-scoured floor, the bright

candlesticks on the high mantel-shelf, the steaming kettle on the hob, the strings of onions and bunches of lavender suspended from the ceiling, the rows of glittering pewter dishes on the dresser, the pleasant faces of the two girls, and gave a nod of hearty approval to John.

‘I am very agreeably impressed indeed with the house, Mr. Brophy,’ she said.

‘Ay, ’tis clean and tidy,’ he answered ; ‘an’ you’ll find a rare bit o’ feathers o’ Farmer Tom’s own plucking i’ the beds, I’ll be bound ;’ then, turning briskly to the girls, he added : ‘Now then, gells, the lady wants the best room for herself, and another for the maid, I dare say, an’ a few of them good rashers of yourn, or whatever else nice you’ve got for supper.’

‘Which, by the way, I should like to have brought into my chamber, in case there is a fire-place there ; for I have a great deal of writing to do this evening,’ interposed Miss Somers.

‘There, gells ! you hear that ? Run, one o’ you, and light the fire ’t once. And now, miss, I must bid good-night ; the missis, you see, ull be a sittin’ over her tea-pot and bilin’ hot herself, I dare say, at my biding away so long. Good night !’

She thanked him for his good offices, and his burly form disappeared through the kitchen-door. A calm seemed immediately to fall upon the place—such a calm as might have attended the subsidence of a boisterous east wind.

‘Are you acquainted with *Mrs. Brophy*?’ asked Mary Somers of one of the farmer’s daughters, when John’s footsteps without were no longer audible.

‘No, miss,’ said the girl, a little startled by the abruptness of the question.

‘Have you ever seen her?’

‘Oh! quite frequent, at church of a Sunday.’

‘What is she like, then?’

‘Well, she is tall, for one thing.’

‘Very tall?’

‘Oh yes very!—and thin; and her hair is a dreadful yellow, and her eyes are very queer—no particular colour in them at all; that sort, you know.’

‘Is she an Englishwoman?’

‘Them as ought to know says as she is a furriner, and most people says it was a queer notion of Mr. Brophy’s marryin’ *any* woman speakin’ foreign languages, and a pity too, for you see *he’s* thought a good bit of in these parts.’

‘Do you know what her name was at the time of her marriage?’

‘No, miss; I’ve never heard tell.’

‘Have you ever heard the name of Lydia Parker?’

‘No, miss; never.’

Here the subject was merged into the more practical one of supper, and was not resumed again between them.

John’s reflections, as he wended his way homeward, were of a singularly complex nature; and anything like an intelligible presentation of them in their natural order and sequence would be well-nigh impossible. The astonishment occasioned by the sudden miscarriage—after so long a gestation—of a favourite theory, had given place to a sense of exultation over the accomplishment of a happy stroke of business: the tangible evidence of which he now carried in the form of a ten-pound note in his waistcoat pocket.

But this pleasant reflection was marred in some degree by the fear that the instinctive caution with which he approached all business matters had for once failed him in this transaction. ‘Who,’ he asked himself, ‘was this Mary Somers, dropping, as it were, out of the skies, to augment at the same time his bank

account and the sum of his perplexities? What could be the object of a woman with diamonds on her fingers and bank-notes in her purse in choosing his poor cottage for a winter residence?' His intellect, though of inferior quality, was permeable at least to the truth that diamonds and bank-notes did not, as a rule, grow on blackberry bushes, and that elegant and accomplished young ladies were rarely inclined, without serious cause, to entomb themselves for the winter in the wretched purlieus of a village brewery.

But what, after all, was it to him? Had he asked questions irrelevant to the main subject of letting the cottage, he might, in offending her, have placed in needless jeopardy a very excellent bargain. Having had resort to an advertisement, who but a stranger naturally would apply?—a stranger into whose private affairs and motives he had clearly no right to probe. He had made no stipulation either as to the sex, age, or degree of his possible tenant; and in the case of the reference proving satisfactory, and the bank-note genuine, he certainly had nothing whatever to do with the motives or the possible aberration of mind which had led to the selection by Mary Somers of Deadwick as a place of abode.

If the truth were known, in just so far as it was merely a question of sex, John, accustomed to the acidulous article at home, was by no means averse to having so young and fair a neighbour; and as he trudged along, he even found himself harbouring a design to sweep and garnish the brewery yard upon the morrow, and subject his office to a thorough and wholly unprecedented course of renovation.

But Mrs. Brophy might object to this dangerous propinquity of a pretty face, and, indeed, therein lay the core of his perplexity. Ask himself as often as he would why she *should* object, the conviction that she *would* do so, obtruded itself with great persistency upon his mind. Singular to say, in measure as this thought recurred, his combative nature awoke. Though he was not by disposition masterful, and his habitual phlegm was seldom disturbed, a heat at times crept into his temperate blood, and it is to be feared, after all, that under suitable provocation his passions were capable of easy ignition. ‘Had he not a married man’s right to do as he pleased?’ he argued, ‘and would he not resist interference—not by subtlety and craft, being English bred and born—but by lusty self-

assertion ?' That, at least, was his firm intention now. He was conscious of having driven an excellent bargain, and he took the tangible proof of it once more from his pocket, and examined it by moonlight. Yes, it was *done*: he had given his receipt and his promise in black and white, and no power in heaven or earth could make him revoke a promise when once given in good faith.

You will thus perceive that John possessed the two traits of character between which there is an almost invariable correlation—stubbornness and honesty. He also reflected that if he permitted criticism upon *this* subject to pass unrebuked, the brewery itself might be next invaded, and feminine formulas as to malting be thrust under his very nose.

Still, an indefinable feeling of uneasiness kept obtruding itself upon his mind. Analysis of this feeling, in all probability would have revealed nothing to explain its existence—for there *are* poisons, the subtle operations of which no scalpel can ever lay bare. You cannot dissect a presentiment, any more than you can paint a fear; nor can you drive it away. Try it and see. Employ all your exorcisms; laugh and pooh-pooh yourself into a state of belief; and it will sleep

until you have done. Attempt to drown it in the cup, and you will find it alive among the dregs at the bottom. John had already been battling for some time with one of these familiar fiends, and he felt the grip of another upon his heart as he reached his garden gate at last. For one moment he stood irresolute before entering. Overhead, great white flakes of vapour were scudding before a wild high wind; in the west, the star-beams, woven into a veil of mist, obscured the distant line of the Stubbleshire hills; dabs and splashes of shadow lay here and there upon the pallid road; from the sweating sod of the meadows curling masses of steam were everywhere rising;—mephitic and evil influences seemed abroad in the air that night.

‘Ay, ay! the missis ull be sure to find fault wi’ my lettin’ the cottage to the young gell; but I’m danged if I’ll stan’ any nonsense about it, anyhow,’ he said at last, shutting the gate with a loud slam, and walking with determined strides towards the house.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

THE 'best room' at the farm-house, into which Mary Somers had in the meantime been shown, certainly justified the hearty eulogiums of Mr. Brophy. Entirely filling one of the gable-ends, the walls rose slantwise on two sides, and came so near to an isosceles-like junction above, that the room bore some slight resemblance to a tent. A square of carpet in the centre revealed an edge of deal boards scrubbed to an astonishing degree of whiteness; muslin curtains hung before the casemented window; the bedstead, with its lofty tester and dimity furniture, was knee-deep in feathers; a family Bible with a brass clasp, and an owl with a shred of cotton-wool protruding from his bowels, stood upon a chest of drawers. A framed sampler, representing a funeral urn

and a weeping willow, hung upon one side of the bed, and a portrait of the Prince of Wales on the other. Everything was immaculately clean, neat, and orderly. A bright fire soon burned in the grate; the dressing-table, removed from its post by the window, was drawn into the centre of the room, and covered with the supper cloth by one of the girls; a tall silver candlestick contributed its lustre to the general fund of comfort, and at last an appetizing odour of fried bacon made the final, and, as it would appear, successful appeal to the senses of the fair stranger.

Mistress and maid ate the meal in silence. It was quite obvious that, with the former, some pre-occupying thought or fancy had quickly replaced the mere animal sense of hunger. It seemed equally clear that the rare virtue of taciturnity was conjoined to a submissive temper in the person of the latter. When the cloth had been removed, the mistress at length said :

‘Katty, open the travelling-bag and bring me pen, ink, and paper. I have a long letter to write, and you may sit by the fire until I have finished.’

The girl noiselessly obeyed the command,

moved the table closer to the grate, snuffed the candle, then curled herself up like a spaniel upon the rug, and went to sleep. Her mistress sat reflective, with her feet upon the fender, for a long time; then, turning sharply around, she spread out a sheet of paper, dipped her pen in the ink, and commenced to write. She soon became so absorbed in her work, that any merely casual sound, such as the falling of cinders from the grate, the rattling of a window-sash, or even the creaking of a door, would have fallen upon heedless ears. This would seem to be a favourable opportunity therefore, reader, if you are at all curious as to her appearance, of admitting you at once into her presence. Enter noiselessly; there can be no indecorum in the act. The light of the candle, falling directly upon her face and figure, affords you an excellent chance to form an impartial judgment.

She is rather inclined to plumpness? Certainly; you perceive that at once, and recognise in it the happy medium between mere fleshy bulk and bony angularity. It may be that her figure has *not* reached its fullest development, but you will admit that it imparts no positive impression of unripeness, and, indeed,

exhibits contours upon which a critical eye might rest contentedly. Of course, her features are by no means classical ; her mouth, we confess, is a trifle large—a fault frequently noticeable in our latter-day beauties ; but there is a compensating amount of vermilion, we are sure, in the lips, and her smile, if it could be seen, would prove to be far from disappointing. Her nose is just ‘tip-tilted’ enough to make it a very piquante feature, you perceive ; and as for her cheek-bones, they doubtless *would* become prominent in a time of universal famine, but are sufficiently well covered now. If you are a captious critic, you will be sure to notice the freckles upon her face, but you cannot fail to approve the general clearness of her complexion. Her eyes—you cannot see them—so intently are they fixed upon her writing, are brown as to colour, and may be defined as of the ‘snappy’ variety, between which and an energetic temperament there is supposed to be more or less correlation. Finally, as to that wonderfully luxuriant crop of chestnut hair, if you are of the gentle sex, deficient in capillary adornment and at all envious, it would be better to withdraw from your point of espial at once.

Meanwhile she plods steadily on at her task ; except that she raises her eyes now and then, and holds her pen poised in mid-air while she determines the form and construction of some important sentence, there is no sign of intermission or a desire to rest. The clock on the mantelpiece ticks in ceaseless monotone, the cinders drop now and then from the grate, a sound of heavy breathing comes from Katty's parted lips at intervals, the wind snarls savagely at the window, a ' thief ' creeps into the candle, and a steady trickle of grease upon the table is the result ; but not until she has affixed her signature with a scratch and a splutter of her pen to the document, and exhales a long and somewhat frost-bitten sigh over the accomplishment of her task, does she awake to a consciousness of the sounds and objects about her.

CHAPTER IV.

AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION.

WHILE Katty, aroused by a shout, and a tap of her mistress's foot, is busily engaged in stirring the fire, let us seize the opportunity to peep into the closely-written pages upon the table, and if possible discover their import. A sudden relapse into her meditative mood enables us to do this with great facility. Thus the letter runs :

‘DEAR SIR,

‘In the course of our initial interview at your office in Lincoln's Inn Fields on Wednesday, I could not fail to perceive that I had found in you not only an astute legal adviser and a vice-guardian, so to speak, but a warm-hearted gentleman, in whom I could feel unlimited confidence and trust. Strong in this conviction, I spoke unreservedly of the

sad entanglements of my family history. Sure of your concurrence and earnest sympathy in my endeavours to elucidate the mystery of my father's disappearance, I now hasten to comply with your suggestion, and commit to writing the outlines of the narrative in which you were good enough to manifest so great an interest. With this brief exordium, let me commence.

‘I was born, to the best of my knowledge and belief, in the town of Arles, in France, though the register at the mairie comes very far from giving satisfactory evidence upon this point. My father, Charles Summerfield, was an Englishman, the only son of an ex-lord-mayor of London, from whom he inherited a considerable fortune. Diligent search has failed, however, to show that I now have a single existing relative. A vague tradition of my grandfather still lingers about Guildhall and the Mansion House ; but what tangible reminiscences of him I could obtain were scarcely worth the pains of gathering. At Oxford I learned, in addition to the fact that my father had graduated with honours and was well liked by the university people, that a serious scandal in connection with a lady, the particulars of which I failed to obtain,

had somewhat tarnished his good repute toward the end of his collegiate career ; whether this has any bearing or not upon subsequent events I am not in a position to declare. The remainder of his life, up to a period when he came within the range of my perceptions, is to me an impenetrable void. My earliest impressions of him are associated with the jingle of *diligence* bells, the clatter of horses, the rolling down horrible zigzags, and the frightened tones of a woman's voice. I remember, too, a great blare of trumpets and the tramp of an armed multitude through a leafy avenue, which must have been in Paris. Then I recall a terrible nausea and the rocking and creaking of a mighty ship. At this point my permanent impressions begin. We lived first in New York, afterwards in Perth Amboy, a little town in the neighbourhood. The family consisted of my father, mother, and myself. He, as I then remember him, was kind and indulgent ; my mother, tender, weak, and sickly, and crying much in secret. She had been pretty once, and it appears had been an actress at the Théâtre du Gymnase in Paris at the time of their meeting. Now that I have seen the quality of the acting at that theatre, I am persuaded that she

must have possessed uncommon abilities; but what with an incurable malady and the crushing weight of some mysterious sorrow—the nature of which I have yet to learn—she seemed utterly cowed down and broken in spirit; what little energy she still possessed was mainly expended in the effort to impart to me a thorough knowledge of her native tongue.

‘I often think, in looking back to that period of my life, that, in spite of a rugged and somewhat undemonstrative nature, my father loved me deeply. A child’s instincts seldom err in such matters, and I certainly thought so at the time. I am sure that he was proud of me, and he manifested considerable feeling, I know, when I went away to school in a neighbouring town.

‘Life in Perth Amboy was very pleasant. We lived in a villa near the bay; and indeed it was but a step through the garden to the shore, a resort I so much loved that I rebelled, and strongly too, against being sentenced to four years’ imprisonment with hard labour in a boarding-school. But my resentment was short-lived, and though the sea was my first and dearest love—and I was ever faithful to it—I soon began, in my fondness for study,

to perceive, like Desdemona, 'a divided duty;' divided no longer, however, when the summer holidays came, and with them all the wind and the sound and the fragrance of my dear old friend the sea once more. For a week my mother's eyes were in a trickle of joyous tears. On the first morning my father, with an awful solemn face, told me to trot out my Latinities for a rigid inspection. Found wanting in the ablative-absolute and other trying respects, I began to pout, as any other spoiled child would. Then he roared :

"Let the Latin go to the dogs," said he. "Come, jump into the boat, and I'll teach you how to catch blue-fish."

'And he kept his word. Many and many a day, in spite of wind and weather, we flew across the bay and into the broad Atlantic swell, with the bitter sea spume dashing over us, and our lines flicking the curling water in our wake, until, perhaps, some blue-fish or skip-Jack sprang at my hook, and would have dragged me overboard, had I not set my feet against the thwarts and resolved to have him or die. How my father laughed at me until he was black in the face! and how he shouted, "Brace yourself up, and hold him tight! Don't let a brute like that get the

best of you. Now he is coming this way, quick! haul in the slack-line. Steady, he's off again! now pull for your life. Aha! bravo, Marty! Remember this, little girl, as you go through the world: there is no use of taking the trouble to hook a fish if you do not secure him at all hazards."

'I beg that you will excuse the digression, but I find my mind often reverting in these latter days to my fishing experiences, and I think there is something more than a piece of commonplace wisdom in my father's injunction. An old gentleman was recently pointed out to me who angled a whole season through at Teddington Weir for one particular old trout, and caught him at last. To-morrow I cast my line in the Stubbleshire waters, and shall endeavour to emulate the example of that persistent old gentleman.

'Those happy days at Perth Amboy were, however, of short duration. The summer of 1861 came, and with it the fourteenth anniversary of my birth. I was to spend my vacation at home, as usual. My father wrote to say that on the day of my arrival I should have a sail in a new yacht which he had recently purchased. It so happened that school broke up a day earlier than I had

expected, and with a high sense of elation over the prospect of surprising them at home, took passage on the steamboat, which in those days daily descended the Raritan from New Brunswick. It was a lovely morning, and I remember indulging in countless day-dreams as I sat upon the upper deck, watching the river flags and grasses bend before the swash of the paddle-wheels, until a sharp smack in the heavens, and a sudden blotting out of the sun, warned me of a storm, and I descended into the cabin. A furious hurricane followed, and when I landed at the Perth Amboy wharf, the thunder and lightning were simply appalling. I arrived home at last, drenched to the skin, to find my mother in tears and overwhelmed with terror. From her I learned that my father, in company with two ladies, guests at a summer hotel in the neighbourhood, were out in all the storm upon the bay. Her presentiment of evil was fully verified. My father never returned. The ladies never reappeared at the hotel. The little yacht in which I was to have sailed the following day was found waterlogged and empty in the channel. There seemed no room for doubt in both our minds that my father and his companions

had miserably perished in that beautiful sea-water which had hitherto been my chief delight.

‘That was the gloomiest summer of my life. The heavy burden of grief was too much for my mother to bear. In a few weeks she sank into her grave, and I became an orphan.

‘The poignancy of my sorrow was, as might be expected at my age, of short duration. I returned to school. I was introduced by my father’s solicitor to an elderly gentleman, who announced himself as my guardian and future protector. (How well he has fulfilled his trust we both of us know.) I accepted the new order of things with a child’s indifference to any change that is not accompanied by actual hardship and suffering. My chief regret was for the Perth Amboy villa and the beautiful sea-water. I revisited the town but once, under circumstances which I am now about to relate.

‘I finished with school just three years after the date of the tragedy which had deprived me of a father’s love and protection. An early predilection for art, conjoined to an ineradicable love of travel and adventure, had led me into adopting the

project of a European tour as the *idée fixe* of my life. To give it further emphasis, I determined to become a painter by profession, and made a formal application to my guardian for permission to visit Italy in the prosecution of my studies. He shook his head gravely at first. He maintained that if the project were not of itself chimerical, my extreme youth would in any case constitute a sufficient reason for withholding his consent to its being carried into execution. Fortunately, however, about this time it came to my ears that an intimate friend of his had been appointed to a consulate in one of the principal Italian cities, and I straightway made such effective use of this information, that within a week it was definitively arranged that I should become an inmate of the consul's family, and accompany them to their destination.

‘And now a circumstance occurred which gave not only a fresh impetus to my determination, but a new colouring to my life's aims and ambitions. This was in July, 1864; in the first week of September we were to sail. Amid the tumult of preparation which filled the intervening weeks I found time to visit a schoolmate in Orange, who, in a burst of confidence, one day imparted to me her sus-

pitions that neither my father nor his two companions had perished in that terrible storm, as I had always been led to believe. You can imagine the effect the shock of such a discovery had upon my feelings. I was old enough to comprehend the significance of my friend's innuendo. I was, if anything, precocious ; and saw at a glance that my chief inheritance was that of a disgraced and sullied name. I summoned my guardian without a moment's delay. I shut myself up in a room with him alone, and demanded to know the truth of the imputation put upon my father's honour. He was visibly startled by the nature of my inquiries, and endeavoured for a time to evade them. Finding such a course, however, to be useless, he finally admitted, with an expression of profound regret, that there *were* suspicious circumstances connected with my father's disappearance, which, in the absence of positive knowledge, he had not felt it incumbent upon him to impart to me. Further questioning elicited the nature of these "suspicious circumstances," which were three in number, and briefly as follows :

' 1. That according to a discovery made by his solicitor, my father had, previous to his

disappearance, disposed of securities amounting to a very large sum.

‘ 2. That the pilot of the steamboat upon which I had taken passage that fatal day had observed three persons near the scene of the supposed disaster enter a carriage, and drive rapidly in the direction of New York, there being, it would seem, ferry communication between Staten Island—where he witnessed this occurrence—and the latter city.

‘ 3. The baggage of the two women, with whom it appeared he had been on terms of great intimacy, had been removed from the hotel the day before, their bill had been paid, and everything clearly indicated a premeditated purpose on their part.

‘ To my dismay, I learned that no further inquiries had been instituted—that not even these suspicious circumstances had been sifted as their importance deserved. The residue of the estate after my mother’s death, had been administered for my benefit by order of a court that took no cognizance of village rumours, and there the matter ended.

‘ I then formed a bold resolution, the mere announcement of which filled my good guardian with consternation and dismay.

‘ “ *I have a motive, if you have none, for*

probing the mystery which surrounds my father's disappearance to the very bottom, and I mean to do it," I said, at the conclusion of the interview. I set about the task the very next day. I have been about it ever since. I shall persevere in it to the end. My father may have long since ceased to live; he may have been foully murdered; he may now be languishing in some horrible madhouse in despair of the succouring hand which, with God's help, I may yet extend him. That evil of some kind has befallen him I am as sure as I am of being at last upon the track of its authors.

'I resolved to make my preliminary inquiries in Perth Amboy. I was young to assume such a grave responsibility; but I was tall for my years, and with strangers readily passed for twenty: moreover, I possessed abundant confidence, and there was sufficient of my mother's *finesse* in my nature to temper my English bluntness of expression and manner.

'Putting aside as an inopportune weakness a desire to revisit the old villa first of all, I hastened at once to the hotel, and made my business known to the landlord. He was of a reticent disposition, and possessed of a

singularly untenacious memory, which even the hotel register failed to refreshen. Under the date of the 25th May, 1861, were entered the names of

“Mrs. Warren . . . England,

“Lydia Parker . . . do.”

Reference to his books showed that on the 19th of August in the same year Mrs. Warren had paid her bill in full and quitted the hotel. He certainly *did* have some recollection of a boating accident in that year, but the times had been so stirring since then, that he really could not recall a single feature of it; and as for the two ladies, for the life of him he could not have sworn that they did not leave the hotel in the usual way in the “bus.”

‘Fortunately, at this juncture I met an old friend and playfellow—a certain Mr. Smythe, who was a year or so my senior, and had spent many seasons at this hotel. To my astonishment and joy, I discovered that he knew Mrs. Warren well, and was in a position to give me much valuable information, of which the following is a brief summary :

‘On the first night of her arrival, by a series of adroit questions, as I conceive it,

she ascertained from Mr. Smythe that Charles Summerfield was then residing in Perth Amboy; that he was married, lived on excellent terms with his wife, and had but one child. From her manner at the close of the interview, Mr. Smythe was firmly persuaded that she had been previously acquainted with Mr. Summerfield, a belief that was afterwards participated in by all the guests of the hotel.

‘This, if capable of proof, might throw some light upon the cause of the scandal at Oxford, and tend to explain the mystery which bore so heavily upon my mother, and which, but for the suddenness of her death, would, I am sure, have been revealed to me.

‘Lydia Parker was present at this interview, and was, indeed, Mrs. Warren’s inseparable companion. No doubt existed in Mr. Smythe’s mind as to the confidential nature of their relations.

‘He had also seen my father and the two women together; had accompanied them, it would appear, on one or two sailing excursions, and had observed nothing in *his* demeanour beyond a thoughtful and pre-occupied expression, which naturally struck him on account of its variation from his habi-

tual cheerfulness. He was sure no signs of a secret intelligence passed between them—he watched *her* too closely for that; to tell the truth, he was dreadfully “spooney on her” himself, and was so cut-up when he learnt of the accident, that he lost his appetite for a week. He did not dream that it was anything *but* an accident, until he heard about the luggage being sent away, and what the pilot of the steamboat *Magenta* said, and he could not deny that *that* did indeed seem very suspicious.

‘Upon one point there could be no conflict of opinions. Mrs. Warren was obviously a beautiful, fascinating, and for this reason dangerous, woman. I was soon convinced of this, first by a view of her photograph, and second by the almost religious regard with which Mr. Smythe regarded this photograph and a mere scrap of a note in her handwriting, with which she had summoned him to a ‘promenade’ on the beach. Wondering—if my estimate of her character were a true one—at her want of caution in thus parting with her portrait, I found, upon questioning him closely, that he had bribed a chambermaid of the hotel to abstract it from her chamber. Here I had a verification at once of my

worst suspicions. I had some difficulty in persuading him to relinquish these precious mementoes, but he at last consented; and until I succeed in bringing both the women, if guilty, to justice, just so long will they continue to be inestimable treasures to me.

‘ In lieu of a photograph of Lydia Parker, I obtained a description which answered my purpose equally well.

“ She is tall and thin, with yellow hair and perfectly horrid eyes,” said Mr. Smythe, with a gesture of disgust.

‘ The removal of the luggage was verified by the carrier, who took it, according to instructions from Mrs. Warren, to the office of the New Jersey Express Company in Rahway, a neighbouring town. There, an examination of the books revealed that four boxes had been forwarded on the 20th of August, 1861, to the St. Nicholas Hotel, New York.

‘ With this ended my investigation in and around Perth Amboy. I have never seen the old town since.

‘ I next visited New Brunswick, in search of the pilot of the *Magenta*. I was fortunate in finding him at home—but my interview with him was almost barren of result. He

remembered the circumstance perfectly well, but there never had been—to his knowledge—such a storm on the bay, and the rain swashed so against the windows of the pilot-house, he couldn't see anything distinctly twenty yards off. His assistant at the wheel had called his attention to the people on the beach, and he merely gave a glance at them; there might have been three or four—they might have been all men or all women; he couldn't have told for the life of him; he had enough to do to watch the wheel, and keep the boat in the channel. He believed there was a carriage, too, when he came to think of it; but, as he said before, the rain prevented him from seeing anything distinctly. And so the interview ended.

'I next called upon my father's solicitor in New York. He seemed surprised to see me, but in nowise astonished at the nature of my communication. He stroked his chin gravely for a few minutes, then he invited me into an inner office, offered me a seat, carefully closed the door, and, taking a bundle of papers from his desk, he drew a chair up close to mine, and said :

“Miss Summerfield, you have taken a great load off my mind by coming here to-day. It

has been intimated to me that you were to sail for England about the first of September. I had felt it my duty at once, upon learning this, to make to you, previous to your departure, a communication of great importance respecting your father. Latterly, however, I must confess that I have felt an extreme reluctance to bring the subject to your notice ; your presence, therefore, to-day, and the nature of your errand, gives me, as I said before, a welcome sensation of relief."

" "Is the matter then so serious?" I faltered, with my heart sinking at once to zero.

" "Miss Summerfield, I am afraid it is," he answered ; "and I trust you have the fortitude to hear the worst. What would you think if I were to inform you that your father is not dead ?"

" "I should think you were telling me the truth," I answered promptly.

"He seemed surprised.

" "And did you suspect?"—he asked, looking me keenly in the eyes.

" "That my father eloped in company with Mrs. Warren and Lydia Parker?—yes. Is that the worst I am to hear ?"

" "You quite astonish me, Miss Summerfield," he replied ; "I was not prepared for

the completeness of your knowledge. This in one sense *is* the worst ; though he has, I am afraid, greatly wronged you in a pecuniary sense ; it was through my making this discovery that I learned of his being still alive."

' Hereupon I confided to him my purpose of fathoming what, under any and all conditions, was still an inexplicable mystery, and urged him to make me familiar with whatever steps he had taken toward its elucidation.

" " I arrived at what knowledge I possess in a very simple manner," he answered, untying the bundle of papers, and taking out one, which he unfolded and held up for my inspection. " That," said he, " is a private schedule of securities, in your father's handwriting, which I found among his papers shortly after his disappearance from Perth Amboy. Upon comparing it with the securities, in a box which he had left for safe keeping at the bank, I discovered that bonds to the extent of two hundred thousand dollars were missing. Alarmed at the discovery, I was at first suspicious that a fraud had been committed ; but inquiry in Wall Street, and an examination of the sales at the Stock-Exchange — upon which these particular

securities rarely appeared — developed the astonishing fact that Mr. Summerfield had disposed of the bonds in person, the numbers upon those purchased exactly corresponding to those upon the schedule in your hand. The next question was, what disposition had been made of the proceeds of this extraordinary sale?—a question which it would be incumbent upon me to answer when put by the administrators of your father's estate. My first inquiry was at the office of Messrs. Forbes and Co., where, to my increased amazement, I learned that, in August, Mr. Summerfield had purchased of them a draft on London for forty thousand pounds. One of the partners, observing my look of surprise, then informed me that Mr. Summerfield had explained to him that, fearing the issue of the war, and apprehending a disturbance in the monetary system of the States, he had resolved to re-invest the bulk of his fortune in London.

“ I now experienced a feeling of relief, and immediately ordered payment to be stopped upon the draft. Imagine my profound astonishment, therefore, Miss Summerfield, when, a few weeks later, I received a communication from Messrs. Forbes and Co. to

the effect that the draft in question had been duly paid to Mr. Charles Summerfield by their correspondent in London. Here was an unexpected dilemma ; but fortunately I had revealed to no one as yet the secret of the private schedule. So my suspicions being at length aroused, I instituted inquiries of a different nature, the result of which was to leave little room in my mind for doubt that, on the 21st of August, 1861, your father sailed in the steamer *Leviathan* for Liverpool. I, too, investigated that matter of the luggage, and ascertained by the register of the St. Nicholas Hotel that, on the evening of the 19th, Charles Warren, Mrs. Warren, and Lydia Parker were guests of the hotel, while in the published list of "passengers sailed," in the *New York Times*, three days later, these names again appear. In short, Miss Summerfield, I cannot refrain from uttering my profound conviction that your father is now alive, and, in doing you a grievous wrong, has, at the same time, committed a terrible outrage upon your mother's memory."

'I was now stronger than ever in my determination to visit Europe. By a lucky chance it was decided that we should sail in the *Leviathan* ; and at last, with the photo-

graph and the signature of the woman who I was convinced had lured my father into disgrace and social degradation, in my pocket, I was fairly embarked in my new character of Nemesis. I prosecuted my inquiries on shipboard without success, until, the purser appearing about the middle of the voyage (he had been busied with his papers and accounts in a little den of a cabin until then), I made him the objective point of an interrogative attack. I soon discovered that he had been attached to the *Leviathan* for nearly five years, and that, after a brief exercise of recollection, he was able to remember the three passengers distinctly. When I showed him Mrs. Warren's photograph, he at once exclaimed, "Lord bless us! there can be no mistake about *that* face."

"There was a woman with yellow hair," he said, "and a middle-aged gentleman, of whom, being of the same sex as himself, he had taken but little notice." What was of still more importance, however, he informed me that their destination was Leamington; he recalled that fact perfectly, because he had recommended them to the Duke of York's Arms, the landlord of which was his eldest brother.

'Immediately upon my arrival at Liverpool

I journeyed to Leamington with my coloured maid—having agreed to meet the consul's family in London—and sought out the Duke of York's Arms. There I ascertained that, with one brief interval of absence, Charles Warren, Mrs. Warren, and Lydia Parker had lived there for six weeks during the autumn of 1861. Here every trace was lost. Mr. Warren had paid his bill, and the three had departed; in what direction, at that length of time, it was impossible to tell, but it was believed "northward."

‘ Full of despondency over the result, I rejoined my friends in London, and, after a week's futile scrutiny of faces in the streets, gave up the undertaking for the present, and proceeding to Italy, devoted three years to the study and practice of my chosen profession. Twice during this interval did the unquenchable hope of discovering my father and reclaiming him from the toils of that wicked woman blaze up anew. Upon the first occasion I discovered the well-known names upon the register of the Hôtel Danieli at Venice. Again, six months later, I discovered that they had been living in 1863 at the Hôtel de la Minerve at Rome. The head-waiter remembered them well, after I

had shown him the photograph. He then recalled to mind the important circumstance that the gentleman had been taken alarmingly ill, and that the three had thereupon journeyed with all haste to England. He knew it was England; for Mrs. Warren had written concerning a bracelet which she averred she had lost in the hotel, and about which a great fuss had been made by the proprietor; indeed, he thought it probable that they *might* have her letter now in the office. The result justified the waiter's perspicacity, and I rewarded him, I think, far beyond his expectations, for I had obtained the much-desired clue at last. Mrs. Warren's letter *was* found, and, what was more important to me, it was dated from No. 6, Bedford Place, London.

'I felt all my old ardour revive at once under the stimulus of this discovery. I immediately left my friends, wrote to my guardian of the determination I had formed to pursue my quest to the bitter end, and set out with my maid for England.

'It did not suit my purpose to go in person to No. 6, Bedford Place. I took the precaution, first of all, to write under an assumed name, a mild appeal for charity, to that ad-

dress. In a few days, my letter was returned by the post office authorities with "gone away" scrawled across the envelope. I then went to the house, which proved to be a genteel lodging-house, and was met by a verbal "gone away." The landlady, who appeared at my request, was profuse in her civility ; but it was evidently the rule of her house that no questions should be answered at the door.

'I had another profound fit of discouragement, during which I received that letter from my guardian in which he confided me to the good offices of yourself, his old and esteemed friend. I did not at once avail myself of his suggestion, as you know, in the excitement attending my latter discoveries, which promise to play such an important part in the disentanglement of the great mystery. It all came about in the strangest manner, as you are already aware. Pushing my inquiries everywhere at random, I was one day introduced to a gentleman whose business consisted I believe, in hunting up and establishing the identity of heirs of unclaimed estates—of whom, in the course of a desultory conversation, I inquired whether, with a knowledge of the *names* of the parties only, it were possible

to trace a marriage in the official registers at Somerset House. His answer was discouraging, as I expected it would be ; but when I mentioned—by I know not what impulse—the name of Lydia Parker, he at once replied that he remembered having seen the name of Lydia Parker that very morning in a register of marriages. He recalled it from the fact that it occurred upon the very folio he had been examining in connection with some case he then had on hand.

‘ The next day I was in possession of an official memorandum setting forth that on the 12th of August, 1864, John Brophy was married to Lydia Parker, in the parish church of Deadwick, Stubbleshire ; and I then immediately recalled that some months previously, when in search of a small furnished house, I had seen an advertisement of a cottage to be let by John Brophy, brewer, Deadwick, Stubbleshire. Here certainly was a strange conjuncture—provided this were really the Lydia Parker of whom I was in search. I lost not a moment in deciding upon a course of action. I despatched a trustworthy messenger first of all to Deadwick, to obtain, if possible, a description of Mrs. Brophy. The report was satisfactory in

one respect—she had yellow hair. I then called upon you with my guardian's letter, and related substantially what I have now, in conformity with your wishes, committed to writing. Leaving my boxes to follow in case I should prove successful in obtaining the cottage at this late day, I this morning journeyed by rail to Limeborough, and about dusk arrived at Deadwick. I was fortunate in finding Mr. Brophy in the act of closing the gates of his brewery ; still more fortunate in discovering that he was eager to let the cottage—which is a wretched affair, mostly mud and straw, and enormously dear at ten shillings a week. Beyond a sneer or two, however, which I was wholly unable to suppress, I gave expression to no sign of dissatisfaction, and promptly accepting his terms and conditions, became his tenant for a period of three months from to-day. Insisting—rather awkwardly, I thought—upon a reference, I have given him your name and address. For obvious reasons, I have assumed the name of Mary Somers. It might be as well for you to intimate to him the nature of my profession, the vagaries of its followers being so universally well known, that it may relieve me from the necessity of defining the object of my

visit here. Mr. Brophy is an honest, well-meaning, thrifty fellow—a mixture of peasant and tradesman; transparent as glass—so far as motives are made visible in speech—and capable of being a trusty ally in any serious question of wrongdoing. Of Lydia Parker, whose identity, so far as personal description is concerned, with the Deadwick brewer's wife, I have, from information obtained in this house, no longer reason to doubt, I know absolutely nothing; consequently, I shall be forced to use the utmost circumspection in pushing my inquiries in that direction. I suspect, from Mr. Brophy's talk, that she is a bit of a tartar, and a *bas bleu* of a somewhat inferior quality—conditions by no means inconsistent, I know, with lamb-like immaculateness of character. However, we shall soon see. I shall quietly take possession of my cottage to-morrow. On Sunday I shall go to church, obtain a seat where I can study Mrs. Brophy's face at my leisure, and then I shall be prepared for action. I, of course, possess the initial advantage of being unknown to her; but as I cannot hope to maintain this beyond the point when the very nature of my inquiries will clearly establish my identity, it promises shortly to be a war

between a woman's wits and a woman's cunning. I hope soon to have the pleasure of a personal interview with you in London; in the meantime, I remain, sir,

‘Most respectfully yours,

‘MARTHA SUMMERFIELD.’

She folded the letter, carefully sealed it with red wax, and then wrote upon the envelope the following address :

‘HENRY PALMER, Esq.,

‘101, Lincoln's Inn Fields,

‘London.’

The candle having by this time burned low in the socket, Katty now arose, unfastened her mistress's hair, which fell in a wavy mass over her shoulders, brushed it awhile in silence, then quietly stole from the room. At this juncture, after a brief preliminary sputter, the candle tranquilly expired. Upon which Martha Summerfield approached the window, pushed back the curtains, and stood for several minutes watching the sluggish stream below, the smoking meadows, the dark and silent village, the church with its square tower, the sky filled with streaming

tatters of clouds ; and then, quickly undressing, she listened a moment to the booming of an express-train across the meadows, and at last betook herself to bed and dreamed pleasant dreams.

CHAPTER V.

MR. BROPHY CHANGES HIS MIND.

MRS. BROPHY'S love of punctuality had become a disease, of which John, as a rule, watched the symptoms carefully. On this particular evening, however, he determined, as a new sensation, to adopt a vigorously aggressive policy, not knowing whether a mere defiant impulse was sufficiently buoyant to carry him safely through the ordeal before him. There are two ways of imparting information which we have reasons for believing will prove unpalatable to the recipient. The usual method is to temper confession by excessive humility of manner ; another, and frequently effective mode, said to be much in vogue with the proletariat of Lancashire, is to anticipate opposition by a more or less determined putting down of the foot. John resolved upon the latter course. The front

door closed behind him with a bang that awoke loud protests from every dog in the neighbourhood; especial emphasis was given to the slinging of a 'billy-cock' hat upon the rack; then he burst into the dining-room like a simoon-blast, and seizing the poker, fell with a snort upon the grate.

Mrs. Brophy was evidently astonished. She had been simmering with indignation for an hour past. She had bestowed upon him, as he entered, one of those withering post-nuptial glances which it so soon becomes the sad privilege of a Benedict to behold. How dared he thus to break one of the domestic commandments! But this indifference to the signs of her displeasure! what could that mean? It was clear that John's delay was attributable to some business perplexity, and so her contentious mood gave way at once to one of conciliation. Her features relaxed, and a pleasant word replaced the tart welcome which had at first shaped itself upon her lips.

'You are a little late, John, dear,' she said, as she rang for the tea.

John, surprised at the unexpected tone of her voice, paused in his murderous onset upon the grate, and half-faced round, poker in hand.

‘Ay,’ he answered, ‘’tis a bit late I own, but I could na’ help it.’

‘Well, you have been busy, I suppose, and I shall not scold. Has anything of importance occurred this afternoon, John dear?’

Secretly pleased at the unexpected serenity of the domestic atmosphere, and fearing to ruffle it by a too abrupt disclosure, John now did a foolish thing—he temporised.

‘Nay,’ he replied, with a marked subsidence of bluster in his manner; ‘nay, Lydia, nothing very important. I’ve been busy, as you say: and I had a good bit o’ writing to do—a thing I can’t abide, as you know; and then I had to run down to Farmer Tom’s awhile——’

Here she interrupted him with:

‘Oh, if that is all detained you, drop the poker and come to table. I have waited long enough; I thought by your face something disagreeable had happened.’

This seemed so much like a relapse into her former mood, that John felt a fine sense of aggression spring up within him at once. But happily, under the narcotic and subduing influence of the tea, the reviving acerbity of her manner was quickly dispelled; and the

conversation drifting into other channels, all traces of storm soon disappeared from the atmosphere. But in measure as her good humour increased, a perplexing doubt as to the expediency of the proposed revelation crept into his mind. He was not in the habit of subjecting his purely business matters to home analysis and comment, and it was clearly within his own province to decide whether what was commercially productive was, or was not, objectionable in another sense. His thoughts floundered about in the quandary for a time; then, coincident with the passing of his second cup, came a resolution to defer the communication until he had heard from Mr. Palmer of Lincoln's Inn Fields. To this shortly succeeded, as its natural corollary, a firm conviction that it was unadvisable to say anything about the matter at all.

Had she been really sagacious in her interpretation of his moods, she would have had it out of him at once. As it was, though the workings of his mind were by no means intricate, they were perfectly unintelligible to her. She had a general knowledge of his whims and vagaries, and to these she had learned to accommodate herself with some

measure of success. She could accurately foretell, and by this means often avert, the coming of a conjugal tempest: postponing, in such cases, to a more favourable period her own little outbursts of irascibility. Beyond this she did not go. She rather despised his mental processes, if the truth were known, and held his inventive faculties to be of an exceedingly jejune and meagre order. She believed him to be quite incapable of harbouring an *arrière pensée*, or, indeed, of concealing any thought at all. In short, in common with many others, she held the bucolic temperament to be quite unworthy of serious analysis. His physical gifts, however, she highly esteemed, thinking of him in that light as a prize-ox sort of possession, which she was anxious the world should recognise as her own undivided and inalienable property.

You will thus perceive that John's purpose, fortified by reasons quite satisfying to his conscience, was in no great danger of discovery. The not remote contingency that Miss Somers would shortly forfeit the rent of the cottage, as an alternative to facing the horrors of a Deadwick winter, had duly presented itself to his mind; and he also

recalled the important circumstance that, since the date of her first visit to the brewery, when she offended John by holding her nose in the vat-room, Mrs. Brophy had persistently refused to enter within its precincts again. It seemed a reasonable conjecture, therefore, that to her, at least, a knowledge of the new tenant would never come.

There was but little wisdom in this purely hypothetical conclusion, especially as he left a most important factor, the church, entirely out of his calculation of the chances. But it is just possible that a haunting fear of Mrs. Brophy's jealousy was at the bottom of it all. He remembered the case of the Limeborough barmaid, and the gusty scene that followed the discovery in his pocket of a letter signed 'Your faithful Sarah.' It turned him quite cold whenever he recalled it to mind, and the scream of derision with which Mrs. B. pounced upon the orthographical eccentricities of that unfortunate letter. John's prudence was, as a rule, confined to monetary transactions, and his shrewdness had gone to abundant seed in the same direction. He could fight like a paladin upon occasion, and with a relish, preferring it, as a speedy method

of trying conclusions, to copious acerbity of speech. He could overwhelm an angry woman with the mere force and momentum of his wrath. Against a woman's petulance, however, he could make no more headway than can a horse in its struggles with a gad-fly. The mere effort on the part of a muscular man to extend his arm and knock down an antagonist, is often easier than one minute's exercise of the power of self-repression. But there is a wonderful restraining force in selfishness, and it must often be surprising to ourselves to discover the amount of provocation and insult we complacently endure before we are brought to the point of actually kicking the man who has made us the subject of testamentary notice.

Motives differ only in degree, however, and we have no desire to screen John from the charge of selfishness. If anything, he possessed that undesirable quality to excess, thereby neutralising several other very excellent ingredients in his composition ; but it is only fair to say in extenuation of his present peccadillo, that he had been recently much perplexed by the aspect of his conjugal relations. Secret misgivings as to the wisdom

of his choice, even, had come to him at times. To be sure, he felt it a satisfactory thing that such fine accomplishments had been secured for the Brophy family, and he had had from the first a nebulous impression that his heir, if such an inestimable blessing were vouchsafed him, would inherit a knowledge of foreign languages. Moreover, he conceived that somehow he must shine vicariously as a very gifted person, capable, under suitable stimulus, of holding his own in intellectual society. He held the brick from Cicero's villa in reverential awe, showed it with an impressive air to humble visitors, and was not at all taken aback when farmer Tom once asked him, under his breath, 'And pray who, Mr. Brophy, *was* Ciceroo?' 'A great scholar wi' a bald pate, as is mentioned by Dan'l the prophet. Any fool 'ud know that,' was John's scornful rejoinder.

Still, he had his dubitative humours, as well as moments of downright scepticism, as to his wife's superior gentility. An old uncle or aunt in Bloomsbury Square, London, would have seemed to him to be the proper thing in the way of credentials. But, as near as he could make out, all the members of her family, excepting 'her cousin, Mrs.

Warren,' whom he had never seen, were great people in America, and India, and Australia, and in the Antipodes generally. This extraordinary hegira of all the members of so good a family struck him at times as being excessively curious. But, what is not demonstrably false is always impressive when sufficiently interwoven with the mysterious. Hints of excessive wealth, in the mouths of clever people, have been known, for a time, to supply the place of actual capital. Gifted and plausible *chevaliers d'industrie* have won heiresses before now. But imposture, like everything else, has its laws and limitations; and no scheme of deception was ever so intricate, or cunningly devised, that it did not ultimately fall to pieces with a crash more or less fatal to its author.

Let us hope that John, who, without being uxorious, truly respects and admires his wife, will never regret in bitterness and sorrow the day she crossed his life's path. Whatever *her* secrets may have been, however, John was conscious of possessing one which got strangely and weirdly into his dreams that night. He found Mary Somers' brown eyes pursuing him through a kaleidoscopic dance of prisms. Then he fell, entangled in a

million threads of light, whence he was sucked, as it were, into the glare of a great sun, which he knew at once was Mary Somers' diamond, and which blistered his eye-balls as with fire. Thereupon he was forced, with the sting of needles beneath his eye-lids, to witness scenes in which a familiar face appeared distorted like a horrible mask; and he, the strong man and heavy sleeper, whom thunder failed generally to arouse, started up in bed with clammy sweat oozing from his brow, and his flesh in a quiver. Lydia, his wife, whose face he had just seen travestied by one of the Furies in his dream, and who should now be sleeping beside him, had disappeared. He extended his hand: her place was still warm. He looked about the room: it was empty. The moon, which was now in the zenith, cast vertical shadows, and he saw, sprawling like skeleton fingers upon the window, strange shapes of twigs cast from the chestnut tree in the garden. Then he descried a red gleam, as of spilt blood, streaming from a crevice in a door leading to the next room—all this in an instant. Then was plainly audible a click, as of the springing of a lock, and before he could leap from bed, the door opened, and he saw his

wife—a lighted candle in her hand, and a strange blank look in her eyes—slowly advance to the bedside. In vain did he call ‘Lydia!’ The cry fell on dull ears. She turned her back, extinguished the candle, crept quietly into bed, and a moment later he heard the sound of heavy breathing. His impulse to seize upon her and shake her into consciousness had been overpowered by he knew not what supernatural influence. He arose, entered the other room, and attentively examined every piece of furniture bearing a lock. These were three in number: an old oaken press, the doors of which invariably stood ajar; a chest of drawers, the key of which had long been missing; and a black box belonging to Mrs. Brophy. The latter was always securely locked; it was so in the present instance, and John, after a close examination of the hasp, was irresistibly forced to the conclusion that the clicking noise he had heard could have proceeded from no other source. This box had always been more or less of a mystery to him; he was in entire ignorance as to the nature of its contents, and, what was stranger still, he had never known Mrs. Brophy to open it herself. Furthermore, he was satisfied, after a series of

experiments with her bunch of keys, that she could not unlock it if she would. Greatly troubled and perplexed, therefore, by what he had seen, he once more made a careful examination of every article in the room, but with no better success, until, returning to the box, his hand this time came in contact with melted candle-grease upon the lid, which gave an instant verification of his suspicions. Again he felt the hasp of the lock, and found it immovable. Then he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his sleeve and considered. Mrs. Brophy had repeatedly assured him that the box contained nothing but some old letters and papers, and he found by tilting it on end that its weight, and a rustling noise as of papers sliding to the side, gave confirmatory evidence upon that point. But she had also told him that the key was lost or mislaid—a statement which he had corroborated in the manner we have indicated, and with which, up to this moment, he had been perfectly content. Perhaps, though—and here a new and consoling thought came to John—she might have mislaid it in her sleep; and according to what he had once read in a ‘Book of Dreams,’ she would be able to find it only while in that condition.

This seemed such a reasonable conjecture, that he straightway re-entered his chamber and crept into bed again. Listening a moment to the heavy breathing of the woman by his side, he turned, and was about dropping off asleep, when he heard a sharp cry; and starting up, he found his wife sitting erect, with her hands to her face.

‘Four thousand pounds—not a penny less,’ she exclaimed, turning fiercely round to John; then, heedless of the look of blank amazement which a ray of moonlight made visible in his face—she threw herself back upon the pillow with a sigh, and was silent as before.

John pondered a long time upon the meaning of these words, and succeeded in demonstrating very clearly and satisfactorily to himself that, to whatever else they might refer, they could have no possible bearing upon the mystery of the black box—of which he deemed it expedient to make no mention on the morrow. By the exercise of a little vigilance and wakefulness in the future, he would probably discover where the key was secreted, when he could prosecute further inquiries at his leisure. Arriving at this sage conclusion, he turned over once more, and was quickly asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE COTTAGE.

WHEN Martha Summerfield came to examine the cottage thoroughly by daylight, she did not fail, in the pauses of exclamatory comment, to admire the brewer's audacious coolness in demanding ten shillings per week for such a wretched affair. She saw at a glance that, in its present condition, it was totally unfit for occupation. This led to a prompt invasion of John's office, and a statement of grievances, which was met by his immediately despatching one of his men for a charwoman.

'Well, miss,' he said, in a not particularly unctuous manner; 'you canna deny that your comin' were suddint-like, and as for th' old woman as does the charin' hereabouts, she'll be here as soon as I can get her here. You could na' well expect to ha' the cottage scrubbed afore daybreak.'

She could not gainsay such an obvious fact,

and, indeed, in view of his ursine brusqueness of speech, and a certain visible inquietude in his manner, she deemed it prudent to say nothing more upon the subject. In the absence of positive knowledge, she hastily assumed that a domestic 'unpleasantness' had followed upon the announcement by John of the sex, age, and general appearance of the new tenant; and that, as a consequence, he had had early morning qualms as to his wisdom of the eve.

Martha Summerfield had just reached that self-asserting, confident period in her life, when, whatever the judgment of others might be, her opinion of Martha Summerfield and her powers was of the most flattering and satisfactory nature. Having encountered grey-haired fools of both sexes, she felt justified in disdaining the wisdom born of mere worldly experience. Here it was that her sagacity was capable of being led off upon false scents, and, possibly, of dragging down hornets' nests in a most unexpected manner at times. She had great faith in phrenology—judged a man by the size of his cerebellum; read faces as she would coarse print, and detected guilt or innocence at a glance in the pupils of a person's eyes. She had, too, a subtle way of putting this

and that together—the pieces of widely differing puzzles, perhaps—and blinded herself in the most persistent manner to the incongruity of the result. She believed that speedy conclusions were more or less the result of inspiration, and therefore gave a loose rein to impulses, the infallibility of which were insured, she thought, by their very spontaneity. From all of which it may be inferred that some head-breaking conviction of her unwisdom will not unlikely be forced upon her yet in a moment of crisis; for, as a rule, is it not under the wrench and strain of some easily preventible calamity that we first distinctly perceive the flaws and imperfections of our moral nature?

Her surmises, however, had not gone seriously astray as yet. For the present it sufficed that she should perceive the change in John's manner, and prudently resolve to defer any further inquiries or complaints until the arrival of Mr. Palmer's letter should put an effectual end to whatever was equivocal in her present position at Deadwick. She therefore concentrated all her energy upon the task of making the cottage habitable, and with such good effect that, on Saturday afternoon, the work of renovation was quite complete.

John was her first visitor. His face, which up to this moment, had not recovered from the disquieting influences of the episode in his bed-chamber, was now positively radiant. An open letter was in his hand.

‘I thought I’d just step in a minute,’ he said, ‘an’ let you know as I’ve heard from Mr. Palmer. An’ so you be an artist, eh? Lord bless us, if I’d ha’ thought a little harder, miss, I’d ha’ knowed it from your taking the cottage. Artists, I’m told, ha’ such whimseys and notions, like.’

‘I am afraid that you are prejudiced against artists, Mr. Brophy,’ said Martha, with an affectation of gravity. ‘They are very worthy people, indeed, as a rule, I am sure ; though, of course, not so useful as the brewers. Everybody knows that. We *could* exist without pictures, but we could not very well dispense with our beer, could we?’

‘Oh ay, you’re right there!’ said John with a solemn wag of his head ; ‘but mind you, miss, I’m not agin th’ artists, not I, for if they canna’ do aught but paint, ’twere better’n bein’ idle or a chasin’ butterflies wi’ a net, as I once see an old fool a doin’ i’ this very neighbourhood. The missis, now, *she* had a notion o’t once hersen, an’ actually painted a

pictur—a queer, twisted bit o' woodland as ever you see, but it ha' a rare deal o' colour in't, I confess, an' a power of gildin' upo' the frame, too.'

'Oh, I should like to see it *so* much, Mr. Brophy,' said Martha with an admirably simulated appearance of interest.

'Ay, you must,' he rejoined, in a dubitative manner, 'you must, o' course; the missis ull be delighted to see you.' Then, as if frightened at such shameful mendacity, he hastened to add, designating an unframed canvas upon the wall, 'tell me, now, who is the female yon i' the blue sun bonnet?'

'That is Sassoferrata's Madonna,' Martha replied.

'Who?'

'The Madonna, or rather, *a* Madonna.'

'Think o' that now, *a* Madonna! an' drew out o' your own head, miss, I'll be bound,' said John, approaching the picture like an overgrown woodpecker and tapping it with his finger; 'an' drew on calico, too, as I live.'

'Oh, it is not original, Mr. Brophy,' said Martha, laughing; 'I only copied it; it was painted by a celebrated Italian.'

'Oh ay,' said John with a complacent nod,

‘I’ve heared o’ them Italians, an’ a blood-thirsty people they be, by all accounts. The missis, she were amongst them, and, by the Lord’s mercy, got away again alive. ’Tis there the Pope dwells too, I hear; tell me now, is that so?’

‘Certainly. I have frequently seen him in Rome.’

‘Have you now?—a young gell like you, too, an’ here to tell it. Why surely you ha’ seen as much o’ the world as the missis. An’ the Pope, he were a glarin’ and scowlin’ around at an awful rate, I dare say: there’s not much wickedness i’ the world but what *he’s* up to, they tell me.’

‘Nonsense, Mr. Brophy, he is one of the nicest-looking old gentlemen I have ever seen, and I am sure he is just as amiable and good hearted as he is handsome.’

The look of blank astonishment upon John’s face as she uttered these words was a sight for the gods, but before he could reply there came a knock at the door, followed by a summons to the brewery. A wet sponge upon a slate would have produced no greater degree of obliteration than was wrought upon his countenance by this appeal to his purely business instincts. He was disappearing

with considerable precipitancy through the door, when by some occult mental process his mind gravitated back to the subject of the letter, and, turning round, he said, with startling abruptness :

‘Ye mun ha’ an indulgent feyther, miss, by what Mr. Palmer tells me.’

Martha felt her heart give a sudden leap.

‘Does he speak of my father, then?’ she asked.

‘Ay, that he does, an’ right handsome too ; but here’s the letter : read it yoursen, an’ give it me at another time. You’ll excuse me now, if I donna bide longer.’

When he had gone, she took the letter from its envelope and read :

‘ 101, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London.

‘ SIR—

‘ Miss Somers is an artist, and the somewhat eccentric daughter of a wealthy gentleman, a widower, who for some time past has left her to the indulgence of her peculiar whims and fancies : one of which I should imagine to be the renting of a cottage at this season of the year in the heart of Stubbleshire. She is an accomplished and worthy lady, however, and will in every way

prove to be a most desirable tenant, I am sure.

‘Respectfully yours,
‘HENRY PALMER.’

‘Bravo, Mr. Palmer!’ cried Martha, when she had finished the perusal of the letter. ‘*Ça marche!* I shall out with my easel and strew the room with bits of painted canvas, and when Mrs. Brophy comes in the interest of the proprieties, I shall commence the *rôle* of the eccentric daughter. That will be scene the first; the prologue commences to-morrow at the church.’

Within an hour, the little parlour had been transformed into a veritable studio. An easel sprawled in the centre, bearing an unfinished landscape; over the mantel-shelf hung an unframed canvas bright with the curls, the broad-brimmed hat, and merry face of Vigée-le-Brun; upon the opposite wall, beside the Madonna of Sassoferrato, was the head of Guido’s David, while the table, the chairs, and the floor itself were strewn with a miscellaneous litter, presenting the usual antithetical medley in which ecstatic monks lie cheek by jowl with bacchantes, and Venus gets, with strange perversity, into the laps of

the patriarchs. In this respect an artist's studio does not differ widely from a graveyard, in which—orthodoxy being the sole condition of entrance—the wise and the foolish, saint and sinner, Phryne and St. Ursula, are shuffled with but little discrimination or order together.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE CHURCH.

MARTHA SUMMERFIELD carefully scanned the sky upon rising the next morning. Just before closing her eyes in sleep she had seen the moon steering through a broad expanse of *cirro cumulus* cloud. This presage of storm, however, was not yet fully verified. Shafts of sunlight, refracted vertically from the superior atmosphere, and broken upon the ragged edge of lower clouds, filled the sky with cold metallic gleams; while from the east came darker cloud-shapes, lapelled with snow, whence fell at intervals a skurrying precipitate, that for an instant whitened all the hedge-row branches. But the weather was not sufficiently threatening to prevent Mrs. Brophy's going to church, that much seemed perfectly clear; and Martha,

at the first tap of the bell, tripped blithely in that direction.

A number of village gabies were loitering about the churchyard ; and as she entered in at the wicket, she could not fail to perceive that she was the focus of a dozen pair of inquisitive eyes.

‘ ’Tis the new painter gell,’ said one, as she walked up the gravel path.

‘ An’ a rare good-lookin’ un, too,’ rejoined another, with a smack of approval. To which Martha, inured by a three years’ experience in foreign picture galleries to inquiring glances and whispered personalities, gave no further heed than to disperse her critics by diverging from the path, and pushing suddenly into their midst :—her object being to gain a certain grassy mound which commanded a lateral view of the old church. The age of the latter, however, was the only thing about it that entitled it to a respectful scrutiny. A squat Norman tower, looking like a venerable Cyclops with its one round window ; a rusty sun-dial with its numerals mostly effaced by weather-stains ; low lichen-covered walls, filled with seams and fissures ; a red-tiled roof, and a mere stump of a chancel ;—such were its features, and how-

ever interesting they might have been in an archæological sense, they inspired in Martha nothing beyond a feeling of curiosity to know the value of the Deadwick living. Once, on a rainy Sunday, in a country inn, she had devoted herself, in the absence of other means of beguilement, to a two hours' examination of the 'Clerical Directory;' and the curious anomalies as there set forth, of the English Church system—a system at all times paradoxical to the American mind—without doubt inspired the feeling of curiosity in question.

However, she had but little time for idle conjecture. The bell ceased its measured peal, and broke into a lively patter of quarter-notes, and by the time she had made a circuit of the church, and had examined the inscriptions upon a few of the older tombstones, a steady current of village folk had set in in the direction of the church porch. She entered, therefore, without further delay, and was conducted by a wheezy old beadle to a square, straight-backed pew near the reading-desk, from which, by dint of much craning of the neck, she could obtain an excellent view of the whole congregation. One sweeping glance at the assembled faces convinced her

that John had not yet arrived, so she allowed her eyes to wander over the building in a vain search after the picturesque :—its barren grey walls, its poor bits of crimson window-glass, its boarded ceiling with vermiculated tie-beams and king-posts impending ominously above the heads of the people, its undraped altar, and general unsightliness, making, it is needless to say, but a feeble appeal to her æsthetic instincts. Then, hearing her name mentioned in a whisper, she discovered, by peering over the back of the seat, that the adjoining pew was the abode of the harmonies, as represented by a melodeon and a quintet of very young men and women. The origin of the whisper was at once made manifest by the presence there of the farmer's two daughters, whose sense of importance, as they returned Martha's salutation, was clearly visible beneath the mantling colour in their faces. At this point, however, the bell ceased to ring, a rustle that came from the turning over of prayer-book leaves went through the church, followed by a general rising. Then came from the desk the words 'Dearly beloved brethren,' in a tone so low and sweet, that Martha instinctively turned to look at the reader. He was

a young man, but little older than herself in appearance, with handsome features, rather swarthy in hue, with black curling hair, bead-like eyes, and small side whiskers. With her first glance Martha had given a start, caused by the recognition, as she thought, of a familiar face, but an appeal to a very acute and retentive memory of human physiognomies showed her at once that she was mistaken. It was possible, however, that a resemblance in it to, or suggestion of, some other face had caused her an instant's perturbation. In any case, it was to the charm of the minister's voice that she now principally yielded. She had often shuddered, and felt her tympanum tingle, as she listened to the rasping utterances or lazy drawl of curates who seasawed drearily through the beautiful service. She was accustomed to hear sermons intoned throughout, and as destitute of the rhythm and melody of true eloquence as are the croakings of priestly rooks in Italian basilicas. But nothing like the sweetness and *naturalness* of this man's voice had ever floated down to her from a reading-desk before, and she found her mind wandering off upon a collateral question, as to whether it were likely that his moral and vocal qualities were

in anywise identical. She had got to the point of reflecting that sweet chords are frequently evolved from gusty reeds and the hardest iron wire, when, hearing a clatter of feet at the church entrance, this small stream of conjecture was immediately diverted into a broader and deeper channel.

Mr. John Brophy's burly form unmistakably obstructed the doorway at that moment, and by his side stood a tall woman, who was arranging her skirts with the obvious purpose of sweeping up the aisle with a dignity befitting her character as the local *Aspasia*. However, before she came properly within the range of vision (for her face had hitherto been in shadow) the General Confession began, and Martha was obliged to kneel out of sight of everything but the rafters overhead. She heard, however, the tread of heavy passing feet upon the stones, and the creaking of a neighbouring pew-door, when the witchery of the minister's voice overcame what would have otherwise seemed an intolerable suspense, and she found herself listening to the solemn words of the Absolution, and joining in the subsequent responses with a fervour quite inconceivable under the circumstances.

Held in but momentary abeyance, however,

her interest in the new-comer immediately awoke when she again rose to her feet. Giving a hasty glance in the direction whence the last sound of footsteps had come, she saw, two pews in advance of her, in an oblique line from where she stood, a profile and figure which she recognised in an instant, from Mr. Smythe's description, as belonging to Lydia Parker. Screening her face with her prayer-book, Martha examined her features in detail. The abundant dusky-yellow hair was confirmatory evidence enough in itself; but there, too, was the chalky complexion, the queer, fishy-looking eyes, the thin lips about which an acidulous smile seemed perpetually to hover, the protuberant cheek-bones, the square jaws, the pointed chin, the long neck and meagre figure.

There could be no mistake about it—at last her eyes rested upon one of the women for whom she had been so long in search. And as this consoling reflection found its way into her mind, she perceived that John, having sought her out with his eyes, was now furtively regarding her with an expression of deep inquietude. Almost at the same instant, she saw Mrs. Brophy look up into his face, then turn around and give a quick suspicious glance

over the church. Martha's prayer-book was instantly raised to her eyes, by which means Mrs. Brophy saw nothing upon which her suspicions could fasten. John, however, looked no more.

At this point, a feeble strain of psalmody arose from the adjoining pew, and then Martha noticed for the first time how dark it had suddenly become. She felt a shuddering wind sweep down the aisle, followed by the slamming of a door ; and in the brief interval of silence that preceded the announcement of the text, she distinctly heard an intermittent patter of frozen rain-drops upon the windows.

Then came the sermon, and a revival of her interest in the speaker. His theme was Christian charity, and it seemed to possess for her a peculiar significance at this time. Disliking exegetical and doctrinal discourse, she had been simply pleased at first by what promised to be a graceful homily, marred by no vulgar tricks of inflection and intonation, and destitute of that fine polemical spirit which discovers subtle distinctions between the colour of swan's down and snow, dissects needle points, and hints at geographical divisions and possible boundary disputes, in a

heaven where schism and dissent must of necessity be relegated to celestial wilds. But she found that, after commencing with a simple, almost colloquial exposition of that pith and epitome of the decalogue—the ‘new commandment,’ he launched forth into an elaborate denunciation of those who did not live up to the letter of the commandment, and submit to a general buffeting of the evil disposed.

‘Life cannot be woven with a single thread,’ he said in conclusion. ‘There must be a warp and a woof, and into every moral texture good and evil must enter in varying proportions. “Woe to ye, therefore, who idly condemn, for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.”’

Whether he felt that especial application of the text lay in the direction of Martha’s pew or not, it is certainly true that the minister fixed his eyes upon her as he uttered these words with a steadiness that awoke in her a decided feeling of rebellion. Who was this good-looking young man, probing into her heart’s secrets, and sitting in judgment upon rational susceptibilities?—this silver-tongued peacemaker, who had probably never suffered

a wrong in his life? She had elected, for purposes of her own, to endure with equanimity a droning service and the piping of a few weak platitudes. In such a church she expected, and indeed desired, nothing better, as it would have enabled her to give an undivided attention to the movements of Mrs. Brophy. She felt it to be almost an impertinence, therefore, when the minister succeeded by the witchery of his voice in diverting her from her purpose to the contemplation of her own possible shortcomings. Not that she was brought to believe in the virtues of benevolence as a universal panacea. Oh dear no! She did not feel that she was destitute of a reasonable capacity for forgiving injury. She might even go so far, she thought, as to forgive Mrs. Warren, were the latter to make suitable expiation for the wrong she had sustained at her hands. But she did not believe in a literal observance of the golden rule—a rule which in its broadest application to human affairs would lead to a disintegration of all social conditions, she very well knew.

‘Sophistry! sophistry! my mellifluous friend. In the present adjustment of things, “Celui qui se fait mouton, le loup le mange,”’

she said, with a defiant snap of her hymn-book at the conclusion of the benediction.

We all of us, somehow, manage to shake off at the church-door whatever disagreeable convictions and qualms may have seized upon us during the fervid progress of a sermon. To this end, the stir and bustle of a retiring congregation, and the exchange of greetings with friends and neighbours, with the consequent introduction of everyday subjects, greatly contributes. Martha, however, had no need for such adventitious aids : that snap of the prayer-book had proved to be a full stop in the punctuation of her reflections ; and before she quitted her pew, Mrs. Brophy, as a subject of thought, had driven every vestige of Christian charity from her mind. She had clearly established the identity of this woman. It was now essential to her plans that she should become acquainted with her at the earliest practicable moment. That moment obviously had arrived. She had but to make her way at once into the graveyard, and await the approach of Mr. Brophy. She would then accost him, and an introduction must of necessity follow

Regardless of the driving sleet and rain, she paused midway to the churchyard gate to

examine the inscription upon a tombstone. She had barely deciphered it, when she felt, rather than perceived, the approach of a burly form ; and looking up with a pretty affectation of surprise, she found herself face to face with Mr. and Mrs. Brophy. She straightway extended her hand with a smile, and said :

‘ Why, Mr. Brophy ! I thought you had gone. How do you do this morning ? ’

John felt a sudden tension upon his arm, and an oblique glance from the wife of his bosom fixed inquiringly upon him. There was no help for it now. It had to come.

‘ Oh, tolerable well, thank’ee, miss. This ’ere,’ he added, turning with a somewhat rueful face to Mrs. Brophy, ‘ this ’ere is my missis. You’ve heared me speak o’ her afore, I’m a thinking.’

‘ Oh, yes, frequently ; and I’m very glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Brophy. I know very few people here, and it’s *so* lonely in Deadwick, is it not ? ’

‘ *Very,*’ said Mrs. Brophy, through the thinnest possible aperture in her very thin lips, while a sudden rigidity of her body became disagreeably apparent to John.

‘ A beautiful sermon ! ’ submitted Martha, in her sweetest manner.

‘Very, indeed.’

Not the feeblest trickle of conversation would she yield. Martha, puzzled by her icy demeanour, wondered if it was her purpose to be deliberately offensive. John, whose face was now as red as a full-blown peony, and who knew what a deluge of words was dammed up behind that impassive manner, came with awkward grace to the rescue.

‘Ay, ’twas,’ he said; ‘though I think as how the parson goes a bit fur, now an’ then, in his notion as to the rights and wrongs o’ things.’ Whereupon, having delivered this sage opinion, he turned as if to go, adding, ‘By the looks o’ the sky, miss, we shall ha’ a bit o’ frosty weather, belike. Good-day t’ you,’ and he resumed his progress toward the gate.

‘Mr. John Brophy,’ said the wife of his bosom, when they had passed out of the churchyard wicket, ‘who is that woman?’

‘’Tis Miss Somers, o’ course; and didna I tell you about her, then?’

‘No, sir, you did not. Who is she, I say?’

‘Well, ’tis strange, if I didna tell you that!’

‘Oh, indeed! is it?’ she said, in what was intended to be a fine tone of irony.

‘Ay, ’tis; but it mun ha’ got quite squeezed

out o' my mind like. You see, Lydia, I've let the cottage.'

Mrs. Brophy dropped his arm, and turning sharply round, transfixed him with a look.

'*To her?*'

'Ay.'

'Mr. Brophy, you are telling me a story.'

He bristled up at once, and was about to make a gusty response, when she interrupted him. 'You have not *let* it to her!' she said fixing upon him a look charged with owl-like wisdom.

'P'r'aps you'll kindly oblige me by telling me what I *ha'* done wi't, then,' he retorted angrily.

'Mr. Brophy, you're a libertine, sir, and I am ashamed of you.'

A stupor came for an instant over John. He had not been prepared for this *dénouement*.

'*A what?*' he roared.

'I have said it. Ask your own conscience, you wicked man. What did you promise me when I discovered your goings-on with that hussy in Limeborough, who spells busy with two *s's*; and a pretty rival, too, *she* was for a lady of refinement and education, and your own lawful wife! What did you promise me

then but eternal love and fidelity for the future? And, now, see how you have kept your word. I am not blind. I can see through things. I noticed your confusion to-day. I saw a look pass between you. You cannot deceive me, John Brophy, with all your artfulness and cunning!

John by this time was a sight to see. He was visibly swollen with indignation; the red in his face had sunk beneath his shirt-collar and tinged the very roots of his hair; he took a dozen strides in advance of her, then, retracing his steps, he burst into speech.

‘I’m domned,’ said he, ‘if all women aren’t fools!’

‘I know it, without being sworn at in the public road with all the people listening,’ she answered hotly; ‘and you needn’t throw it in my teeth either, if you *please*, Mr. Brophy. I should think I *was* a fool to throw myself away upon a man who abuses me and swears at me upon the public highway; don’t remind me of it, I beg of you—if you have any sense of shame, you will not speak another word.’

‘Now, look’ee here——’ commenced John, when a neighbour, quite unconscious of the breach that had been made in the domestic

peace, stepped briskly up and launched forth into a cackle of commonplace, which had the effect at least of permitting the fires of contention to cool down to a point when explanations might be listened to with calmness, and received with mental reservations it may be, but accepted nevertheless by each of the disputants.

John's triumph over the sherry and nuts at dinner, was tempered by a sense of having made a 'mess' of a very simple affair. Beneath the humility of Mrs. Brophy, on the other hand, and her seeming contrition for hasty and inconsiderate words, fermented a purpose which would doubtless have surprised him very much could he only have divined it.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER AN UMBRELLA.

NOT until John and his wife finally disappeared through the churchyard wicket did Martha Summerfield perceive once more that the sky had become black and lowering, and that stinging particles of sleet driven before a wild high wind were beating upon her face. Then, quickly following, or rather growing out of her perception of this fact, came a startling discovery. She saw, streaming out upon the wind, from her neck, a ribbon, to which was usually attached a gold locket—an invaluable possession, since it contained Mrs. Warren's portrait—and which now had disappeared. She verified her loss by removing the ribbon from her neck, then, slowly retracing her steps to the porch, she carefully scanned every foot of the gravel-walk. She had carried the locket into the church, for

she distinctly remembered seeing it during the service. Without a doubt she had dropped it in the pew; in another moment perhaps the door would be closed; there was no time to be lost. She would run back and see. The beadle, however, was nowhere visible; the church, indeed, was empty, and to her mind had, in these few moments, become oppressively solemn and still. Such daylight as filtered through the turbid crimson of the windows fell with a somewhat ghastly effect upon the rows of cavernous pews, and she was quite startled by perceiving, for the first time, in the deepening gloom, the recumbent effigy of a knight with uptilted toes and broken phalanges near the chancel.

Martha caught her breath.

‘*Ouf!* the wretch!—how he frightened me!’

Then she found the pew, and examined the seat. Nothing!

‘Bother the thing!’ she exclaimed, and knelt to make further search for it upon the floor. Suddenly, while in this undignified position, she was startled by a voice:

‘I beg your pardon, but have you lost anything?’ it said.

She knew it in an instant; and starting up

in some confusion from her knees, turned a very red face in the direction of the speaker. There was not much of him visible as yet, only a handsome dark face, peering pleasantly over the top of the pew, and unmistakably belonging to the rector of the parish and the eloquent apostle of Christian charity.

‘A locket—that is all!’ she answered, and dropped without further ceremony to her knees again. She tried to feel annoyed. What business was it of his?

‘Let me assist you,’ he said, pushing open the door of the pew.

‘Oh no, thanks! it’s quite unnecessary. I’d much rather you wouldn’t.’

In spite of this, however, he entered, and joined in the quest.

‘Was it a gold locket?’ he commenced; when suddenly their hands came in contact beneath the bench.

‘Well!’ said Martha, starting up.

‘I—I beg your pardon; the church has become so very dark,’ he submitted.

‘Dark! it’s a crypt. I wish to goodness I was a Russian woman.’

‘Oh! have Russian women a faculty for discovering lost treasure?’

‘Don’t know, I am sure; but they smoke,

and must of necessity carry matches about with them ; you are too good for that sort of thing, I suppose ?'

The parson, a good deal astonished, took a small leather-case from his pocket.

'I deserve the reproof,' said he. 'I am *not* very good, but I smoke ; and I have——stop ! they are fusees ;' and he looked ruefully at one he had taken from his case.

'Well !'

'They give out but a single flash of fire, and——'

'And a Purgatorial odour that would be dreadfully out of place in a church. Yes, oh ! yes—I know.'

'Do you object ?'

'Not I.'

'Shall we try it ?'

'My locket *must* be found.'

Crack went the fusee, a splutter of purple flame leaped forth, to avoid which they made a simultaneous dip of their heads, which resulted in a concussion.

'How disagreeable !' she exclaimed.

'I beg your pardon once more,' said the rector, stooping and rising quickly again. 'I hope I did not hurt you ; but this, I believe, is your locket. I saw a glitter in the corner

as the fusee went off : the thing served a good purpose, after all.'

'Oh, thank you!' she said, taking the jewel from his hand. 'And I wasn't hurt a bit, you know. I meant the smell of the fusee was disagreeable, and not—not the——' here followed an awkward silence, broken only by the tapping of sleet upon the windows.

When he had opened the pew-door and accompanied her to the vestibule, he quietly observed :

'You meant that my awkwardness was not altogether disagreeable. That is very kind in you.'

She was conscious of making a suitable display of colour at this point, but the wind and the sleet came to her rescue ; the church-door flew with a loud bang against the wall, and a perfect *mitraille* of frozen rain-drops burst into their faces.

'Whew!' said the rector.

'How annoying, to be sure!' exclaimed Martha, with a grimace.

'You are not prepared for a storm, I perceive?'

'Unfortunately, no,' she answered.

'If I might venture to offer my escort——'

he said tentatively, shaking out the folds of a capacious family umbrella.

She looked up at the leaden sky, then in his face. It certainly was a very handsome and winning one—not exactly her conception of a clerical face, either: which was, perhaps, to her, its best recommendation after all. He was very young, despite the feeble assertion of whisker upon his maxillaries—too young, of course, to be already married; and therefore eligible for purposes of flirtation, were other sources of beguilement to fail her, she thought.

At this point in her reflections the door shivered an instant upon its hinges, and slammed-to with a crash. A loud shriek went through the tower, and the bell rope at her feet suddenly began to uncoil itself like a snake.

‘I—I guess I will accept your escort,’ she said, with a gasp.

He offered her his arm at once.

‘You are an American,’ he said, when they were descending the path.

‘Why do you think that?’—this with a quick lifting of eyebrows.

‘You said “I guess.”’

‘It’s astonishing what penetration some of you clergymen possess.’

Here, thanks to the wind, the umbrella became sadly involved with the spikes upon the churchyard-gate, and the force of her sarcasm was in a measure broken. When the rector, at the expense of a very red face, had proved himself the physical superior of the wind, and got himself and the umbrella finally into the road, he turned to Martha and said :

‘Now, if you will kindly indicate the direction we are to take, I am entirely at your service.’

‘Oh, Limeborough way. My cottage is but a very short distance from here,’ she answered.

‘Your cottage! Are you then a resident of Deadwick?’

‘Oh dear yes! I am a tenant of Mr. Brophy’s. I live at the brewery.’

A look of blank amazement appeared in the rector’s face.

‘At the brewery!’ he repeated, giving a furtive look at Martha’s sables.

‘Oh, I do not find the odour of hops a bit disagreeable,’ she hastened to say, in a reassuring tone.

He was evidently puzzled.

‘You are, then, one of my parishioners?’ he asked, after a moment’s reflection.

‘Temporarily, yes. You see,’ she added, when she had assisted him in restraining the umbrella from a sudden disembowelling impulse—‘I am too much of a rolling stone to gather any moss in this parish. In other words I am an artist.’

He seemed more and more astonished.

‘And you came to Deadwick to follow your profession?’

‘Yes. I am commissioned to paint the head of a rural philosopher. I have designs upon Mr. Brophy’s head for that purpose.’

‘And you propose to make a philosopher of Mr. Brophy?’

‘He is one already.’

‘Ah! And in what respects, pray?’

‘Well: he married Mrs. Brophy, for one thing.’

‘And do you call that a philosophical act?’

‘By no means—an act of pure philanthropy and self-sacrifice. His philosophy consists in making the best of a bad bargain.’

‘You dislike Mrs. Brophy, I perceive.’

‘I have only known her for half-an-hour, and my impressions may be erroneous. You have had facilities for forming a correct opinion. Will you permit me to ask if *you* like her?’

‘*Admire* her, do you mean?’

‘I did not go so far, knowing that it is unprofessional for clergymen to *admire* other men’s wives. I merely asked if you *liked* her.’

He stroked his chin with his disengaged hand, and the faintest possible smile appeared at the corners of his mouth.

‘Ah! I see,’ said Martha, ‘never mind;’ and then, in another and more abrupt tone, she added: ‘May I ask you another question?’

The smile now burst from his lips and irradiated his whole face.

‘Certainly; a thousand if you wish!’ he answered.

‘Tell me, then, were you ever slapped in the face?’

‘Never to my knowledge.’

‘What would you do if you were?’

‘Ah! that would depend upon circumstances.’

‘Would you in any case insist, just out of the goodness of your heart, we will say, upon turning up your unreddened cheek and imploring another blow?’

‘It is not likely.’

She stopped short in her walk and faced round to him.

‘Then, why, for mercy’s sake, did you preach such a sermon this morning?’

‘I am afraid I am caught,’ he answered, with a good-natured smile, ‘and it is certain that you do not approve of the sentiments I have enunciated——’

‘Oh! I tell you candidly,’ she said, resuming her walk, ‘that if a brother of mine had preached such a sermon, I should have been very proud of him. It was very well written, but——’

‘But what?’

‘Oh well! nothing; excuse me, really nothing; how fast it is beginning to snow!’

His curiosity could not be thus easily diverted.

‘Such an emphatic *but*, I think, requires an explanation, if you will condescend to make it,’ he said, with persistent good-humour.

‘Well, then, as my answers appear to be mostly questions, I will ask, if it is not a “trade secret,” whether clergymen, as a rule, prepare their own sermons? A gentleman—I think he *must* have been an infidel—once informed me that I insulted the cloth by imputing such a thing to them. I do *not* impute such a thing at all—I only ask for information; for I agree in the main with Mr. Brophy,

who assures me confidentially that he finds this to be a most perplexing world.'

'Ah, I see!' he answered; 'you question my sincerity, and suspect that I may have purchased my theories upon Christian charity as I would a surplice or a silver communion service. You are quite mistaken as to one point; I write my own sermons, and have no theories. Preaching being my profession, I never dilute a biblical injunction. There it always is, chapter and verse, with King James' hall-mark upon it, for the benefit of the cavillers; I never go behind it or attempt to soften it down—I am not paid to express private views and convictions in the pulpit.'

'Then you have unprofessional convictions, it would appear?'

'I did not say so,' he replied with a laugh; 'but I presume I am no exception to the rest of mankind; and charity, as I have seen exhibitions of it in the world, is always more or less tempered by personal interests.'

'Well!' said she, with emphasis, 'if I discovered a person stealing the family portraits and plate, and mutilating my father's escutcheon, or cutting my name out of the family Bible, do you suppose I would consult

a work upon ethics before calling the police ?
Umph ! *pas si bête !*

‘ Ah well ! you must confess that would be an extreme case. But, by the way, I perceive that you speak French.’

‘ Whenever it is necessary—yes.’

‘ And Italian ?’

‘ I have been guilty of such a thing for similar reasons.’

‘ You are highly accomplished, then ?’

‘ Not at all. I am of French parentage on my mother’s side, and a three years’ residence in Italy relieves me from any imputation of cleverness in the other direction.’

Just then they reached the cottage door. As he was lifting the knocker for her, he held it, for one moment, poised in the air. Said he :

‘ You do not visit Mrs. Brophy then, of course ?’

‘ Certainly not.’

‘ But you will, without doubt ?’

‘ If I am invited—yes.’

He visibly brightened.

‘ The fact is,’ he said, ‘ I am invited there to tea on Tuesday evening, and it occurred to me, that if you were present, we might renew our conversation under more favourable circumstances.’

Here he let the knocker fall, and she extended her hand.

‘If possible I shall be there,’ she said; then, as she heard the sound of approaching footsteps, she hastily added: ‘I am not known here as an American, and wish to preserve my incognito in that respect.’

‘Never fear,’ he answered; ‘but may I not know the name, at least, of my American parishioner?’

‘Certainly. Mary Somers;’ quickly adding, ‘and I am very much obliged to you, Mr. ———,’ and she laughed.

He laughed in turn.

‘Mr. Thomas Dexter,’ said he.

‘Many thanks, then, Mr. Dexter,’ she said, blushing to her eyebrows; ‘and good-day.’

‘Good-day, Miss Somers.’

Katty opened the door in time to see a great moist umbrella and a pair of masculine legs descending the steps.

Perceiving this, she giggled, and made a great display of ‘ivories,’ whereat, strange to say, Martha immediately lost her temper.

‘Don’t stand there, grinning like a monkey,’ she said; ‘that was only Mr. Dexter, the minister.’

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

WHATEVER sunshine found its way into Martha's dreams that night was stained with the red of cathedral windows. In dreamland she was always a Papist to the core; and many a time the shuffling of sandled feet, the tinkle of silver bells, the hum of psalm and antiphone from deep-stalled choirs, had filled her sleep with a delicious murmur. To-night, proselytism and a familiar face had preceded her into the holy places of her dreams; and when her eyes encountered the flaming cross upon the priest's chasuble, she knew at once, by some subtle power of divination, that beneath the glittering vestment beat the heart of Thomas Dexter. When out of the purple smoke of incense the long procession with solemn chants and lighted candles came, she knew, as she knelt,

that it was Dexter who carried a present God in the monstrance. She looked up at the great windows, and there he was, canonised in stained glass, with a nimbus as glorious in hue as a sunset. Then, with cowl and tonsure, he came and pointed out to her the skulls of dead *Capucini*.

‘Through these curious zig-zags which the doctors call sutures,’ he said, ‘have exuded into sacred dust the ambitions, the hatreds, and revengeful passions of unworthy brothers; fix your eyes upon these empty shells, from which every scowl has vanished, but in which the grin still lingers, the last of mortal man to perish, and I will preach you a sermon upon Christian charity and the futility of hate.’

Then, with the sound of ‘anathema maranatha’ in her ears, and the smart of the scalpel in her conscience, she suddenly found herself in a dark confessional with her face to the wicket, and her heart unburdening itself in rapid and copious speech of its one great secret. Horror of horrors! Instead of absolution, a shout of defiance burst from the confessional, the cowl was thrown aside, and instead of Dexter’s face, there appeared at the wicket the swollen and distorted features of Mrs. Warren.

Then arose such a cry of 'Wolf!' that the arches fairly cracked with re-echoing it. Rude hands seized her, and she was being dragged to some unknown limbo, when she opened her eyes and saw the white walls of her chamber, and a bar of feeble sunshine upon the bedclothes.

'A plague take Mr. Dexter!' she said, with a vicious kick at the foot-board; 'what right had he to turn Catholic and force himself into my dreams, I should like to know? And what,' she added, springing to a sitting posture, 'what *could* have possessed him to come to that pew, and go crawling round the floor, and bumping his head against mine in such a ridiculous manner—*Mystère!*'

Here, with the inconsequence of her sex, she burst into a hearty laugh, and sprang from the bed.

'However, for a clergyman, he is not a bad sort, after all,' she said, approaching the window, and peering through the lozenged panes into the brewery yard.

The weather had made a decent pretence of clearing; the wind had fallen; and though the sun—in burning its way through the early-morning mists, had lost some of its gold—its lack-lustre gleams fell

very pleasantly, nevertheless, upon the whitened roofs. A few fowls were trotting excitedly about the yard in apparent dismay at the strange complexion of the soil, and the astonishing hieroglyphics they left behind them; while others of a more conservative nature, or a presumably greater knowledge of natural phenomena, huddled beneath a great van, and pecked disconsolately at the stones: pigeons were strutting upon the ridge-pole of the shed; a rook came and perched an instant upon the roof of the furnace-room, then wheeled away as the noise of a vigorous fire-raking came from within. Then Martha saw a red glare through the partly open door, and a moment afterwards Mr. Brophy made his appearance and slowly sauntered towards the office.

‘I shall invade that “grizzly’s” den as soon as I have eaten my breakfast,’ said Martha, bethinking herself, at last, of a necessity for hot water and additional raiment. ‘I *must* get an invitation for Tuesday night, and I *must* find out what Lydia Brophy meant by tossing that yellow-ochrey head of hers at me yesterday.’

An hour later she tripped across the brewery-yard and knocked at the office-door.

‘Come in,’ said a voice, the sonorousness of which proclaimed it at once to have issued from the chest of the Deadwick brewer.

‘Mercy, man, what a larynx you have got!’ said Martha, turning the handle of the door, which, when opened, exposed to view Mr. Brophy upon a high stool, complacently stirring a glass of hot toddy with a penholder.

‘May I come in just a few minutes, Mr. Brophy, please?’ she asked, pausing upon the threshold, and bestowing upon him a smile that would have melted old Stractocles, and dragged Simon from his pillar.

‘Ay, my word! you honour me, that you do, Miss Somers,’ he said, putting down his glass, and bustling about for a chair. ‘Sit you down, miss, by the fire, an’ tell me now, what will you have—a drop o’ old ale, maybe?’

‘No, thanks.’

‘A drop o’ gooseberry wine, then, o’ my own making. I’m no great judge, mysen, but I’ve been told by them as ought to know, that it fizzes and stings equal to the best o’ champagne; will you try a drop o’ that now?’

‘No, thanks, Mr. Brophy; it is rather too early in the day, I’m afraid.’

John looked a little dubiously at his own untasted glass, and said :

‘ Well, you see, I always take a drop o’ summat about this time i’ the morning, mysen. I find’—here he tapped his stomach several times with his finger, and nodded his head with the gravity of a man who is about to impart an important hygienic discovery—‘ and I find, miss, that it does th’ insides o’ me a world o’ good, I assure you.’

‘ Don’t let me interfere with your internal arrangements, I beg of you,’ said Martha, laughing ; ‘ take your medicine, by all means, and then I should like to ask you a question.’

John’s smile died at once out of his face ; he reached over for his toddy, and swallowed it almost at a gulp, then, replacing his glass upon the desk, he turned towards her, and with startling abruptness, said :

‘ Tell me, is it anything about the missis ?’

So plain a question was the strongest possible incentive to frankness of rejoinder.

‘ Yes,’ said Martha, promptly ; ‘ if it is not a rude question, what was the matter with Mrs. Brophy yesterday ?’

‘ I’ the churchyard, you mean ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘Well,’ he answered, with something between a snort and a sigh; ‘there’s a many things i’ this world as is beyond all comprehension and finding out, that’s *my* notion o’ it.’

‘You don’t know, then, what *was* the matter with her?’ said Martha, with emphasis.

‘See here, miss, I don’t mind telling you,’ he said, drawing his stool a little closer, and lowering his voice to a confidential whisper; ‘but the fact is, the missis, in spite o’ her larnin’, is a bit queer like.’

‘Queer! what do you mean?’

‘Yes, onreasonable, you know; now tell me, am I right or am I not—isn’t it a pretty tale if a man can’t look at another woman wi’out his missis a getting bilin’ hot about it?’

‘I should say it was very ridiculous indeed.’

‘That’s it,’ said John, triumphantly; ‘that’s what *I* say; there’s no sense in’t at all.’

‘Is Mrs. Brophy jealous of you, then?’

‘Well, I suppose that’s pretty well anigh the name o’t,’ said John, with a fine air of contemptuous indignation.

‘Do you ever give her occasion to be

jealous?' rejoined Martha, with a delightfully malicious smile.

'Me!' (affecting great surprise) 'I should think not, to be sure; but you see, the missis wouldn't believe me, not if I had one hand upo' the Song of Solomon and t'other on Isaiah the Prophet, an' was a settin' on a pile of prayer-books an' swore mysen black i' the face, not she. Why, I once knowed a young woman' (here he glanced at the door, and pulled his stool a few inches nearer to Martha) 'an' a very honest, respectable young person she was, too. She weren't no lady, o' course, on'y a bar-maid, you might say; but uncommon neat an' tidy an' good-natured she allays was. An', well, ye see, I knowed her brother too, an' we'd been intimate like for a long time, so she didn't reckon it no harm to write me a letter—as from a friend *to* a friend—nor I either—but the missis, she found that letter i' my coat-pocket, an' went on at such a rate about it as, upo' my word, it was just disgusting to hear.'

Martha laughed outright.

'Poor Mr. Brophy!' she said, 'I hope you did not get into grief for speaking to me yesterday.'

'That's just what I was going to tell you,

he rejoined with great earnestness ; ' it will seem very ridiculous to you, miss, but she did even go on about that, now.'

' Why, what *could* she say about that ?'

' Oh, nothing of no consequence—nothing at all worth repeating,' said John, with a gesture and a grimace intended to convey a fine sense of disgust for the whole proceeding.

' Do you mean that she was *jealous* of me ?' pursued Martha with a strong womanly instinct faintly stirred within her.

' Well, I should take it so. Yes.'

' Come now, tell me what she *did* say,' pleaded Martha, quite unable longer to suppress her curiosity.

' Oh, a lot o' nonsense about my being a bad un,' said John, nervously pulling at the leg of his trousers ; ' and about my lettin' you have the cottage for nothin'—think o' that now ! *for nothin' !*'

Here Martha fairly screamed with laughter.

' Did you ever hear such foolishness in all your life ?' added John, yielding to the contagion of her laugh, and bursting at last himself into a stentorian shout.

At this instant the handle of the door turned, and a tall figure stepped into the office.

‘God A’mighty!’ said John, leaping from his seat, and overturning the coal-scuttle, ‘it’s the missis!’

‘Don’t be excited, John dear!’ said the new-comer, with chilling politeness; ‘if I intrude, I will at once withdraw,’ she added, turning to Martha and compressing her mouth into the very sourest of smiles.

Martha, feeling it to be a critical juncture, proved equal to the emergency. She rose without the slightest embarrassment, and said :

‘On the contrary, I am the intruder, Mrs. Brophy. I invaded your husband’s sanctum, *sans façon*, and in a terribly stormy mood. I told him, that even an *artist* would rebel against living under a roof that leaked like a cullender, and made a duck-pond of one’s very bed; but I found him to be the most persistently good-natured man I have ever met. He says that I may not only put on a new thatch at my own expense, but a mansard roof and a steeple too, if I wish it. I really had no idea that he was so facetious.’

‘Oh, Mr. Brophy often has his little jokes!’ she answered. ‘I used to laugh at them once myself; but tell me, John,’ she continued, turning round to her sadly bewildered

lord, 'what do you know about mansard roofs?'

'On'y what a friend o' mine once told me, and what I've picked up. out o' the newspapers like,' said John, encouraged by a wink from Martha, but with a sense of getting into very deep water, nevertheless.

'Come now, Mr. Brophy,' said Martha at this point; 'you must *really* do something to that roof. I see you have an appointment with Mrs. Brophy; but before I go, *do* promise me that you will attend to it.'

'Oh ay! I'll do anything in reason,' said John, in the direst perplexity; 'but won't ye sit down an' bide a bit? Y'are welcome to stay, I'm sure; an' as for an appointment wi' the missis!—why, Lord, I'd as soon ha' thought o' hearing the crack o' judgment at this blessed moment as to see *her* here; so ye needn't stir for that.'

'It's quite true,' said Mrs. Brophy. 'It's a filthy hole.'

'Ay, 'tis that!' and John, scratching his chin, looked ruefully about the office.

'And it's quite by accident that I am here, Miss Somers, I assure you. I chanced to be passing by, and thought I would surprise Mr. Brophy; that is all. I have not been here before in several years.'

‘There now, ye hear that!’ and John felt that, if things went on in this way, he should soon be upon his legs again. ‘Now, sit ye both down an’ I’ll bring a drop o’ gooseberry wine.’

John possessed the wisdom of the serpent. There was a certain potency about this gooseberry-wine, and it usually warmed Mrs. B. into something approaching to conviviality.

Martha accepted the invitation at once; and as Mrs. Brophy gave speedy signs of dropping into a companionable mood, she resolved to make good use of her opportunity. Preconceived opinions are oftentimes erroneous; but hers, to the effect that she would encounter in Mrs. Brophy nothing more than a vulgar affectation of culture, was in this case instantly verified.

‘You speak French, I believe?’ said Martha tentatively.

Pretentious ignorance, eager to display its wares, was caught at once in the trap.

‘*Oui, un peu,*’ said Mrs. Brophy, assuming that stern intellectual expression so necessary to elevated discourse.

‘It’s a very nice language,’ I think,’ said Martha, in a general way—‘an *exceedingly* nice language, from all accounts.’

‘Oh indeed, yes, I assure you,’ rejoined Mrs. Brophy, with the air of imparting a great secret; ‘and as for its literature,’ she added, raising her eyes to the smoke-stained ceiling, ‘I just adore it—it’s *beautiful*.’

Not disposed to controvert such an emphatic assertion, Martha contented herself with remarking, in a general way again :

‘I am told that Molière was a very great writer, Mrs. Brophy; is it true?’

‘Oh, elegant! His “Tartufe” is just splendid!’

John felt it to be an opportune moment at this point to contribute to the general store of amenities, which Martha’s tact had put in general circulation.

‘I dare say that is a pictur’ now,’ he said at a venture.

Mrs. Brophy wheeled round her chair, and, flashing a look of scorn at him, exclaimed :

‘Did you ask, John Brophy, if “Tartufe” was a picture?’

‘Ay,’ he answered with a rather crest-fallen look; ‘but I’ll take it back if ’tis na’ agreeable. I donna’ mind, you see,’ he added in a conciliatory tone, ‘whether ’tis pictur’, man, or a four-legged beast; ’tis wonderful gran’ talk, anyhow, and I’m proud to listen to you, that I am.’

Mrs. Brophy smiled compassionately at Martha, and shrugged her shoulders.

‘I have tried to polish him,’ she said sadly, shaking her head, ‘but it is of no use; he thought, for a long time, that Homer was a kind of potted meat. Really you *must* excuse me, Miss Somers, for not having succeeded better with him. You will, won’t you?’

A wicked twinkle came into Martha’s eyes, and she was on the point of making a very malicious rejoinder, but suppressing the untimely impulse, she only said:

‘Certainly, Mrs. Brophy.’

‘Thank’ee, miss,’ said John, with great apparent relief. ‘Seeing that you were a artist, you know, I naturally thought he *might* be a pictur’.

‘True. I had forgotten that you were an artist,’ said Mrs. Brophy, after glaring an instant at her lord. ‘What a glorious profession! Have you studied at all upon the Continent.’

‘A little—yes.’

‘Indeed! You know the Louvre, perhaps?’

‘I have a slight acquaintance with its contents—yes.’

‘Dear, dear! isn’t it beautiful? I have spent *weeks* and *weeks* there—it is simply charming. What do you like the best in the whole collection?’

‘Well,’ said Martha, after a few seconds of intense reflection; ‘I think the mummies and the winged-bulls are *very* interesting.’

‘Oh; but I mean the *pictures*. What artist do you most admire?’

‘Oh! I beg your pardon. Let me see,’ said Martha, biting her finger-nails and hesitating in a way which led John to believe that the missis was coming out uncommonly strong, and had given the artist a poser at last—‘let me see, there is Rubens.’

‘Pooh! Rubens! He is nobody at all,’ said Mrs. Brophy, with a gesture of contempt; ‘I object to Rubens strongly.’

‘You do?’

‘Decidedly.’

‘Why, pray?’

‘His women are too fat; I do not approve of such fat women’ (Mrs. Brophy, as we know, being very lean).

‘You have read “Villette” perhaps?’

‘Yes, I think so; but, years and years ago,’ she answered, slightly colouring before Martha’s inquisitorial looks.

‘I thought so; and you remember what Miss Brontë said about Peter Paul Rubens and his “army of fat women,” of course. It is so nice to read a good strong criticism like that before seeing a picture;—it helps you so much to form your own judgment upon it, you know; why, you cannot imagine how useful Ruskin is to a man who wants to be very, *very* decided in his opinions upon art. You are quite right, Mrs. Brophy; fat people *are* objectionable; the Venus de Medici, of course, is exactly your ideal of female beauty?’

‘No; she is not my style at all.’

‘Goodness gracious! what *is* your idea of Form, then?’ said Martha, with a blank stare at this gaunt caviller at the purist canons of art; ‘perhaps you admire Cranach’s Eves? they are built upon true Batavian principles.’

Never having heard of Cranach, Mrs. Brophy was, metaphorically speaking, off her legs at once; but not for the world would she admit it.

‘Yes, I must confess that I do,’ she said, with much more emphasis than the occasion required.

‘Well,’ said Martha, with her eyes brimful of mischief, ‘I do not exactly agree with you, because I can never be guilty of apostacy

to Rubens and Praxiteles ; but I admit that, in an ethnological sense, Cranach's Eves are exceedingly interesting. You know, of course, it was the artist's theory that the Garden of Eden was situated upon the Maas, and was surrounded by dykes ?'

'A superstition, I suppose ?' said Mrs. Brophy, with a slight show of uneasiness.

'Oh dear no !' said Martha ; 'recent discoveries have put the question beyond a doubt. Isn't it curious ?'

Mrs. Brophy, tormented by a suspicion that there might be something fatuous and compromising in a further pursuit of the theme, contented herself with shrugging her shoulders.

'It is terribly destructive to romance to find that Adam was a Dutchman, is it not ?' persisted Martha maliciously.

At this point, John, with his usual imbecility, came to her rescue.

'Adam a Dutchman !' he roared ; 'an's that a fact ? Like as not, then, he smoked a chaney pipe wi' pictur's on't, as a cousin o' mine, who'd been to foreign parts, once showed me. The Lord help us, what discoveries won't they make next ! I'm told, by a man as ought to know, that there's a new

invention out by which we'll soon be hoppin' about the roofs an' flyin' out o' window like the jackdaws. Think o' that, Lyddy! I can fancy'ee a twirlin' round the big oak and a perchin' upo' the branches like a cock!

'Don't be a fool, Mr. Brophy!' said the suddenly-inflamed partner of his joys and sorrows.

'Nay, you know it was but a joke about'ee flyin', Lyddy. You know I'd put nought upo' you; an' that, if need be, I'd take all the flyin' upon mysen,' said John, in a conciliatory tone. 'But come, Miss Somers, can't you show the missis some o' your picturs? They be rare uns, I tell'ee, Lyddy,' he added in his cheeriest manner.

Martha rose at once: 'I should feel honoured, I am sure,' she said, leading the way to the cottage.

CHAPTER X.

A TALE OF A PIKE.

‘THIS is my studio,’ said Martha, a moment later, pushing open the door of the cottage parlour; ‘walk in, please, you will find everything in the finest possible disorder.’

The ‘disorder’ had been carefully studied by Martha, however. She had made an advantageous disposition of a piece of old tapestry—which relieved, it is true, but a rickety item of the cottage inventory—a chiffonière, bleared as to mirror, and blistered as to varnish, but supporting a fine specimen of Flemish *grès*. This, with a curiously-carved *predella*, which she had purchased in the Merceria at Venice, and a few ivories, constituted quite an effective display. She thought with regret of her store of ‘*vieilleries*’ in London;—her illuminated horæ and Elzevirs, her enamels, and tazze, and Capo-di-monte

china, and of the effect they would have produced upon Mrs. Brophy. But so far as the latter was concerned, however, the contents of the single box she had brought with her amply sufficed.

‘Beautiful!’ said her visitor, evidently much impressed; ‘I should never have recognised the room again; and oh, how familiar!’ striding up to the mantelpiece, and tapping Vigée-le-Brun with her knuckles. ‘Let me see,’ she added, with the reflective air of a person encountering an old friend, whose name had for the moment escaped the memory; ‘let me see, ah! Pompadour, I believe.’

‘Of course,’ assented the shameless Martha, whereupon John glowed with honest pride, and said:

‘Ah! you’ll find the missis knows a thing or two, I’ll be bound.’

This appeared to be such a propitious moment that Martha could not refrain from saying:

‘That is very evident; and how *do* you contrive to exist in such a place as Deadwick, Mrs. Brophy?’

Which was put with considerable adroitness, for Mrs. Brophy turned at once with a

look of great severity towards her lord, and said :

‘ You hear ! Mr. Brophy ? She wonders that I can contrive to exist hereat all. Haven’t I often told you, not many women *would* stand it ? But then, thank God, I know my duty better than that, and I’m not the sort to fly in the face of trouble and affliction.’

Apoplectic symptoms were rapidly appearing in John’s face, when Martha cut in with : ‘ Well, just think of me ! here all alone, with *no* husband, and *no*—have you any children, Mrs. Brophy ?’

‘ Devil a chick,’ said John, promptly.

‘ There are those in the world,’ said Mrs. Brophy, with dignity, ‘ who decline the awful responsibility of rearing a family, Miss Somers.’

John turned from her with a look of the utmost disgust, and Martha cut in again with :

‘ Well, I find it terribly lonesome here, and I was a fool ever to undertake the commission.’

‘ Commission !’ repeated Mrs. Brophy, secretly glad, it may be, to get away from the family question.

‘ Of course,’ said Martha ; ‘ here, of all times of the year, am I obliged to paint the

river, and the meadows, and the distant Limeborough roofs and steeples, simply because an enthusiastic old gentleman happened ten or twelve years ago to catch an enormous pike, the great pike-Methuselah of the river, I believe.'

'I know! I know!' said John, excitedly; 'o' course I know all about it.'

This was unexpected, and Martha was afraid she might have put her foot in it; but she resolved in any event to stick to her text.

'Oh, you do, do you? Well, then, tell me the gentleman's name.'

'Why, Perry, o' course—a little old man wi' a brown velvet coat,' said John, drifting farther and farther away from the family question.

'That's the man,' said Martha promptly, seizing the dilemma by the horns.

'But it appears to me,' pursued John, 'I *did* hear as he was dead.'

She became reckless at once.

'Nonsense! he's as well as ever! and that wonderful pike, stuffed and in a glass case, hangs in the most conspicuous place in his dining-room. The picture, of course, is to go beside it.'

'Oh, ay, I see,' said John, nodding his

head vigorously, and wondering whether, by judicious currying of favour with the artist, pictorial immortality might not be secured for the Deadwick Brewery.

‘So here I am, you see,’ resumed Martha, ‘foolishly committed to a task I should never have undertaken; with no friends excepting yourselves and Mr. Dexter, and, of course, the social prospect is far from being a pleasant one.’

‘I b’lieve you,’ interposed John, conscious of his opportunity; ‘I b’lieve you; I’ve lived i’ the cottage mysen, an’ know just how dreary it must be to a young gell like you.’

To which remark succeeded a pantomimic communication with Mrs. Brophy, which Martha affected not to perceive.

‘And so you are acquainted with Mr. Dexter, then,’ said Mrs. Brophy, adjusting her bonnet-strings preparatory to departure.

‘Yes; I made his acquaintance yesterday, and I think he is a very pleasant gentlemen, indeed,’ said Martha, whose gravity, at this point, was very nearly upset by the outrageous manner in which John was now winking at his ‘missis.’

‘Ay! an’ the parson knows what a good pictur’ is. too, I’ll be bound. He an’ the

missis ha' a lot o' gran' talk over their tea-cups up to t'house when he comes, an' I just wish you could hear 'em, that I do,' said John artfully.

'I was about to observe, when I was interrupted,' said Mrs. Brophy, with a scornful look at John, 'that Mr. Dexter is coming to take a cup of tea with us to-morrow evening, and I should be pleased if you could make it convenient to join us.'

'Oh, thank you so much. I shall come with pleasure.'

'An' the missis ull show you her brick; my word for't, 'tis a rare un,' interposed John, with a grin of satisfaction.

'Her brick! I do not understand.'

'Ay! Ciceroo's brick!'

Mrs. Brophy paused on the sill of the door to glare once more at her lord.

'A little souvenir from Rome, that is all,' she explained; then, when Martha had said, 'O, I see,' she added: '*Good* morning, Miss Somers,' and sailed majestically from the room.

When Martha was alone, she walked the floor for a time in silence; then she suddenly turned, as it were, upon herself, and said, in a serious tone:

‘ Now, Marty, a few words in private to you, miss. There has been too much levity here this morning. You must be more careful. If this Brophy woman *is* illiterate and vulgar, don’t waste time in laughing at her cackle. She is artful and dangerous, and a hypocrite to the core. So be cautious, or she’ll slip through your fingers. The goose that laid the golden eggs may have been an ill-mannered and vicious bird, for all we know, but it is certain that useful fowls should neither have their feathers unnecessarily ruffled, nor be importuned for early eggs. So, *ménagez* your sense of the ridiculous and your malevolence, Miss Marty, if you please, in the future. And here is another thing, whether you are conscious of the fact or not, you are fast losing your head over that silver-tongued youth with the family umbrella—that pew-invading parson Dexter; and I half-suspect that he will purl some philanthropic nonsense into your ear to-morrow evening, that will make you forget all about your poor father and that too, too good-looking Mrs. Warren. Of course, if he does, you must listen with courtesy, and thereby atone for your rudeness of yesterday. It won’t do to chaff him any more. In the first place, it

is wrong to make game of the cloth, and then you see, he would probably wreak a terrible revenge upon you. Sunday after Sunday he would ring the changes upon Christian charity, until, in sheer desperation, you would feel like burning down all the orphan asylums in the land, and wringing the neck of everything you met in a blue gown or poke-bonnet upon the public highways. I wonder if he is half as charitable himself as he pretends to be! I wonder, if you succeeded in bringing home to Mrs. Warren the very highest crimes and misdemeanors, whether he would attempt to placate you with the "Sermon on the Mount," and rub you down with the "Golden Rule." But, pshaw! he can never be more than a casual acquaintance to you; at least'—and there came a reflective pause in her monologue—'he is quite as handsome,' she presently went on, 'as that poor boy, Charley Smythe, who pesters me so with his love-letters, and who would jump off a church steeple if I asked him to do it. He is not rich, I'm sure; his clothes don't fit him, and his umbrella was the *wobbliest* old parachute I ever saw out of Perth Amboy, where they are carefully transmitted, mostly in green gingham, to the care of a remote posterity.

I wonder, too, if he is really very good out of his surplice. You *do* read such dreadful things about ministers in the papers nowadays. I wonder if he has ever been to the Derby, or has seen "La Biche au Bois." He is not a bit forward, however, and he turned quite *scarlet* when he bumped his head against mine in the pew.'

Which recollection upset her gravity again, and she left the room in quest of Katty, in the very best of spirits.

From all this, the reader will distinctly perceive that Martha is not the stern, implacable Nemesis that her letter to Mr. Palmer would lead one to believe ; and that a diversion in her thoughts had been created, by the appearance upon the scene, of the Reverend Thomas Dexter and his umbrella.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THE Reverend Thomas Dexter had always shown a singular indisposition to speak of his family affairs, and for a very good reason. His knowledge of the Dexter brood had never advanced beyond a general one derived from a cursory examination of the D column of the 'London' and other Postal Directories. In other words, fully vindicating the wisdom of a familiar and somewhat jocular proverb, he had not the slightest idea who Thomas Dexter was. His earliest impressions were of looking up, with more or less giddiness, into the face of a very long and attenuated person clad in bombazine, whom, from his first lisp, he had been taught to call 'Aunty Gimp.' He never had cause to question the authenticity of the surname, but he always felt that there was something

apocryphal about the 'aunty,' and when, with the announcement that some unknown benefactor had decided that he should be sent to Eton, she bid him a long and affectionate 'farewell, Tommy dear,' he felt, somehow, that in these words she renounced her auntship for ever. Without family moorings of any kind, he had, thenceforth drifted through school and college terms, for the most part winning plaudits as he went, until, guided by the same mysterious hand, he found himself, like a fish out of water, with no predilection or liking for his calling, in the pulpit of the Deadwick parish church. There had been absolutely no help for it, however. His unknown benefactor insisted—as a condition to the continuance of certain welcome remittances from Coutts and Co.'s bank—upon his taking holy orders, and qualifying himself for institution at the earliest possible date. When that date arrived, the Deadwick living—then about to become vacant through a happy combination of typhoid fever and old age, in the person of the out-going incumbent—and which was in the gift of a young gentleman little interested in the care of village souls, but duly suffering at that time from certain bitter experiences

of the turf and the baize, came most opportunely—if like so much Bank of England script—under the auctioneer's hammer at Tokenhouse Yard; and was bought for the sum of £5,000 in the name and behoof of Mr. Thomas Dexter. The reverend gentleman had been in possession of his benefice very nearly a year, when Martha Summerfield became, in the course of events, one of his parishioners. There being no rectory at Deadwick, he found it quite consistent with orthodoxy and the exigencies of the celibate condition to occupy furnished lodgings in Limeborough. Being young, good-looking, and a clergyman, he soon became a favourite in Limeborough society; and it is safe to affirm that had he dashed straightway—an erotic free-lance—into the matrimonial field, he would have won a substantial victory without a single mention of Aunt Gimp. As it was, solicitous matrons, with superabundant youth and virtue on their hands, competed for early opportunities to ingratiate themselves in the favour of the young clergyman. But soon it was whispered among the would-be elect that Mr. Dexter's affections had been snared by the wiles of Limeborough's heiress, the daughter of the great engineer and contractor, Philip Cadmus, Esq.

Mr. Cadmus was essentially a self-made man. He had set out early in life with the determination to amass a fortune and restore the lustre of a somewhat faded patronymic. When a boy, certain broad acres, and a noble Elizabethan mansion house, now the property of an earl whose ancestor came over with the Prince of Orange, were pointed out to him as ancient possessions of the Cadmus family. This irritating discovery was shortly heightened by a knowledge that that peculiar form of misdirected loyalty called Jacobitism had sent the family plate to the Oxford Mint, and had made sad havoc with the Cadmus title-deeds, the last of which had been cancelled about the time that Mademoiselle de Quérouailles made her appearance as envoy-very-extraordinary at the Court of St. James. Hence it befel that Mr. Cadmus was a bit of a Radical, who thought well of Cromwell for family reasons, and felt it his duty to speak in terms of the severest reprobation of the Hampton Court beauties (Sir Peter Lely, *pinxit*). His resolve that the Cadmus name should be regilded, as it were, and elevated to its former altitude in the county's esteem, had been fully carried out. By dint of almost superhuman energy he had

built up a fortune equalled by few in Stubble-shire, and such was his popularity, that in a notorious stronghold of Toryism he had, as the Liberal candidate at the last general election, come within a few votes of being returned over one who, for twenty years had been the pet member of the district. His wife, feeble in most things, but who had stimulated his energies in the first year of their marriage by opportunely inheriting £30,000 from an apoplectic uncle, died in the year 1864; since then he had continued to reside with his daughter Lottie, an only child, in a rambling old mansion on the outskirts of Limeborough, known as The Elms.

It had been Mr. Cadmus' invariable habit for many years past to set apart the Monday luncheon-hour—he was rarely in Limeborough during the remaining days of the week—for the informal reception of his gentlemen friends. It had equally become Mr. Thomas Dexter's invariable habit to present himself at The Elms upon these occasions. Whether he was attracted thither by the confessedly superior quality of the luncheon, or was simply actuated by a desire to cultivate friendly relations with the possible arbiter of his matrimonial fortunes, we cannot

venture at this point in our story to decide. That he was no misogynist has become sufficiently obvious to the reader ; and, indeed—proving that Limeborough gossip was well-founded—a tendency in the reverse direction might easily be traced in his eager desire to renew his intercourse with Martha Summerfield at the Brophy tea-party. In any case, it will be perceived, that as the latter event had been set down for Tuesday evening, Mr. Dexter's visit to The Elms would be nearly coincident in date with his second meeting with Martha. The conjuncture is not an extraordinary one, and those of our readers who are learned in portents and deep in the sooth-sayer's art may make what they can out of it.

The day proved to be bitterly cold, and Mr. Dexter, noticing the frozen pools and the ice-rimmed gutters as he walked towards The Elms that afternoon, thought to himself at last, ' If this continues, we shall have strong ice on the river to-morrow,' and then he added aloud : ' By Jove ! if she's an American, she can *skate*.'

Now Dexter, being a clergyman and accountable to his bishop for any lapse from decorous speech, clearly should not have said,

‘By Jove!’ and, again, such an utterance, made upon the very threshold of The Elms, savoured somewhat of disloyalty to Miss Cadmus, it is to be feared. However, leaving the expression upon record, let us anticipate Mr. Dexter’s appearance in the Cadmus dining-room, and take the opportunity—while the butler is assisting that young gentleman to remove his overcoat in the hall—to make a cursory survey of its inmates.

Luncheon is nearly over—Dexter is late ; that much is obvious at a glance. Four gentlemen are still at table, sipping claret and port, and endeavouring, conversationally, to crack that very hard nut—the Irish question. The tall man at the end is unmistakably Mr. Cadmus. Ninety-nine women out of a hundred, despite predilections for this or that style of beauty, would pronounce him to be distractingly handsome. He has a well-knit upright form, iron-grey hair and moustache, the latter slightly grizzled, and sweeping from a mouth which would be stern, perhaps, but for a lurking suspicion of humour in its corners ; jet black eyes, from which swift glances speed from time to time into the faces of his visitors—a man full of alertness, vigilance and decision, as you can see at a glance.

At his right sits Mr. Speer, an ironmaster of confirmed bibulous tendencies : portly in form, husky of utterance, and with a face highly embossed with pimples. By his side, and gesticulating freely, is Mr. Crowley, manager of the Limeborough Branch of the 'London and North-North-by-Eastern Bank, Limited,' dumpy in person, intensely anti-Irish in his political convictions, and by nature much too choleric to observe the proper amenities of his calling. Opposite sits a shrewd dog of a doctor, affluent in beard and intellectual as to forehead, and a supplemental waste of very shining crown, who bestows much more attention upon a bottle of Château la Rose by his side than upon the opinions of the banker.

But it is with the group by the fireside that we are most concerned at this moment.

The young lady, sitting in an easy-chair, with her feet upon a hassock, is Miss Lottie Cadmus, *ætat.* twenty-one, and heiress to a very appreciable amount of personal property. Being an heiress, she is not beautiful, as a matter of course : she is rather plain-looking, if anything. At least, that is your first impression, for she apparently affects the severest simplicity of dress, in scorn, it may be, of

adventitious aids to whatever physical attractions she may possess. You cannot perceive the gleam of a single jewel upon her person ; her hands—which are certainly very small and white—are destitute of rings ; and we have been creditably informed that close examination would reveal the astounding fact, that the lobes of her ears are actually devoid of those small orifices with which, in the Darwinian order of things, all female babies will surely, some day, come into the world provided. For the rest, she has a classical little head, full as a nut of valuable accomplishments ; small, but expressive eyes ; an excellent, if somewhat pale, complexion ; and, as if to atone for other deficiencies, a superb figure, than which no better justification could be offered for the simplicity of her attire.

She is talking with much vivacity to the Rector of St. John's, Limeborough, who sits by her side, and takes a sip at intervals from a glass of curaçoa which he holds in his hand. Occasionally she looks up at a young gentleman who, with his back to the fire and his elbows resting upon the mantelshelf, is attentively listening to a conversation clearly beyond his powers of comprehension.

This young gentleman has been exceed-

ingly well favoured by nature. He has red cheeks, blue eyes, curly hair, and a little silky, golden moustache, which twists beautifully, by the aid of a little cosmétique, at the ends. He is Lottie's American cousin—the son of her mother's sister—and having been but two days in England (only arriving at the Liverpool landing-stage in the *Scotia* at five o'clock Sunday morning) he cannot be expected as yet to fathom the profundities of an argument upon Puseyism and the orthodoxy of wax-candles. Finally, his name is Charley Smythe, and he is, as you perceive, an old friend of ours. Were you to encounter him in the street, you would notice that he wears a very deep hatband. This is out of respect to the memory of his father, who died in June of this same year, leaving him an income, derived from successful army contracts, which is much more than sufficient to enable him to prosecute at his leisure certain inquiries bearing upon the fortunes of one Martha Summerfield.

‘Fifty people killed and wounded—just *think* of it!’ said the bank-manager, in a tone so loud that both Miss Lottie and the rector, dropping polemics, faced round at once to the speaker.

‘Please reverse that, Mr. Crowley,’ said the doctor, ‘call it fifty wounded and killed—that will sound much less sanguinary.’

At this point the door opened quietly, and Dexter stepped into the room.

‘Well, call it what you will, it is monstrous that women and children should, in the nineteenth century, be blown into the air by a lot of miserable fanatics,’ retorted the banker warmly.

‘You are right, Crowley; it’s a bad business,’ said Mr. Cadmus. Then, perceiving Dexter for the first time, he added, rising and extending his hand: ‘Ah, here you are at last, my good fellow! Glad to see you; come, join us at once.’

Dexter nodded pleasantly to the gentlemen at table, and shook hands with the rector and Lottie, who had risen to meet him; then he took a seat beside the doctor. He had perceived a strange and comely face in dangerous propinquity to Lottie’s as he entered, and he would have liked to know just what it meant; but when Lottie turned to introduce her cousin, she found that he had retreated to a corner, and was apparently much absorbed in the examination of a photograph-album. Smythe, on his part, opening the album at

random, and encountering upon the very first page a presentment of the new-comer, had conceived, for some inscrutable reason, a dislike to him at once.

‘What terrible Guy Fawkes’ tale was that you were relating as I entered, Mr. Crowley?’ asked Dexter, helping himself to a slice of Strasbourg pâté.

‘Why, Dexter, I am astonished at you! Here is England invaded and London partly blown to pieces, and you profess to know nothing about it!’ said Mr. Cadmus, with mock severity.

‘No — but really — thanks; a little Niersteiner, please’ (this to the butler). ‘Really, I *don’t* know what you mean,’ replied Dexter, in tranquil enjoyment of the goose-livers.

‘Why, the Fenians have blown up the walls of the Clerkenwell House of Detention; that’s what they have done,’ said the banker, unable longer to restrain his indignation.

‘Dear me, what did they do that for?’ pursued Dexter, with an oblique look at Smythe, who had closed the album and resumed his position by the mantelpiece.

‘Just to kick up a terrible pothor, and smash a few thousand panes of glass for the landlords,’ said the doctor, with a shrug.

‘Put a banner into an Irishman’s hands, and a green sash across his shoulders, let him hear a native orator for an hour, and the band play “The Harp that once through Tara’s halls,” then, when his patriotic blood is sufficiently fired, put him among combustible materials—fireworks, gunpowder, nitro-glycerine, anything of that sort—and he will make more noise, break more window-glass, and kill more women, children, dogs, cats, and pigeons, than any other form of patriot in existence.’

‘That’s him!—that’s an Irishman!’ said Smythe, approvingly, from the mantelpiece. When everybody had turned to look at the speaker, the banker remarked, with great emphasis :

‘It’s those Americans, however, that are at the bottom of the whole thing ; that’s *my* opinion of it.’

‘Take care, Mr. Crowley,’ said Lottie, with a malicious smile. ‘I hear what you say ; my cousin will fall upon you tooth and nail if you cast any aspersions upon his countrymen.’

Dexter looked up in surprise at the mention of the word ‘cousin,’ and found that young gentleman positively scowling at him.

‘What does the little beggar mean by that?’ he thought.

‘That is so,’ said Mr. Cadmus, laughing. ‘But, Charley, you do not appear to have a very good opinion of the Irish.’

‘There are Irishmen and Irishmen. I like some of them very much indeed,’ rejoined Smythe promptly.

‘What is the general opinion about this Fenian business in your part of the world? Is it really countenanced in any way?’

‘Not at all. It is such a stupid farce that we can’t even get up a laugh over it; we wonder, indeed, at *your* taking so much notice of it; for, you see, these Fenians, when not professional brawlers and swindlers, are lunatics of the first water, who should have their heads shaved, be put into straight-jackets, and packed off somewhere where they could cool off at leisure—Siberia, for example.’

‘Or Alaska, which you have so kindly taken off the hands of the Czar,’ said the rector, with a smile.

‘Yes, by discounting the *Alabama* claims,’ interposed the banker, who appeared bent upon making himself as objectionable as possible.

‘Yes; tell us now, what about that *Alabama* business? Do the Americans really think they are going to be paid?’ asked the iron-master, hastily gulping down a glass of wine, and turning with a very red face toward Smythe.

‘Well,’ said the latter, with the air of a man who has been asked whether he has a perfect confidence in the ten commandments and the multiplication-table—‘well, I have never heard anything to the contrary, or any anxiety expressed upon the subject. We take it, I believe, quite as a matter of course.’

Here Mr. Crowly laughed outright.

‘Oh, you do—do you?’ he said, with a gratified sense of being both humorous and ironical.

‘Yes, and serve us right, too,’ said Lottie, coming to the rescue, with just the faintest show of colour in her cheeks.

‘Aha, treason!’ cried the rector; ‘we have a Radical amongst us, Mr. Cadmus. She has been sitting at the feet of our young Republican here and imbibing noxious political doctrines, I am afraid.’

Again Dexter looked round at Smythe,—pausing in the act of raising a glass to his

lips for that purpose. Again the scowl appeared upon the face of his prospective relative.

‘Not at all,’ said Lottie, with great decision; ‘we have better things to talk about. But I am sure that we in England are wrong in this matter. Setting aside the selfish consideration of precedent, which might be at some future time so terribly used against us, I think that, if political ethics are anything more than a name, we should frankly acknowledge our sins of omission and commission, and make equitable amends for the same to our sister nation.’

‘This is all very well,’ said Dexter, a little surprised; ‘but what is your argument? Give your reasons for arriving at such a conclusion.’

‘Women express opinions; they never give reasons,’ said Lottie promptly.

Mr. Cadmus exchanged a look and a smile with the doctor. Smythe leaned down, and whispered in Lottie’s ear :

‘That’s right; give it to him. Who is he? I never saw such a conceited-looking prig in all my life!’

Lottie coloured up, and was about to make some reply, when the banker broke in again with :

‘Well, for my part, I am perfectly satisfied that the Americans *are* at the bottom of this Fenian movement.’

‘Nonsense, Crowly,’ interposed Mr. Cadmus; ‘you would hold them responsible for the Abyssinian war, the Sheffield outrages, and the failure of the Royal Bank, if you had your way. Come now, you must confess that the Yankees are not a bad sort, after all.’

Mr. Crowly being obviously indisposed to assent to that proposition, Mr. Smythe cut in again with :

‘The Americans, I can assure you, gentlemen, have too many of their own affairs to attend to.’

‘Such as impeaching their president,’ interposed the rector, ‘that terribly refractory tailor, Johnson.’

‘A tailor! good gracious! is that so?’ exclaimed Dexter, in a tone of disgust.

‘Come, now,’ said Smythe, as red as a peony, ‘this won’t do at all; this isn’t a bit square, you know. Suppose he *was* a tailor, who has got anything to say against it? He’s *President* now, you mustn’t forget that.’

‘Oh, it’s nothing to be a president,’ said Dexter, with a sneer.

‘Isn’t it!’ exclaimed Smythe, taking a step

forward, and making a great clatter among the fire-irons. 'Isn't it, though! Look here, Mister——'

'S-s-h,' said Lottie, rising and laying her hand upon her cousin's arm. 'You mustn't quarrel—Asa Trenchard never quarrels—and you must keep up the reputation of "Our American Cousin." This gentleman, Mr. Dexter, is a very good friend of mine. He is only joking. Mr. Dexter, permit me to introduce to you my cousin, Mr. Smythe. Come, now, papa and the gentlemen want to smoke, I am sure. Do you not, Mr. Speer?' Mr. Speer smiled in an imbecile manner, and she added, 'Ah, I thought so; so come along into the drawing-room, you two, and if you will promise to be very good, I will play for you.'

The butler, seeing the trio enter the drawing-room, immediately appeared upon the scene with a box of cigars. Whereupon the rector, who was an inveterate smoker, joined the group at the dining-table.

In the meantime, while Lottie was playing, the two young men kept up a desultory conversation. Dexter had apologised for his remarks, and the two had made up their differences after a fashion. Lottie favoured them

with a whole series of nocturnes, and this permitted her to overhear the greater part of their conversation.

‘You are the second American with whom I ever became acquainted,’ said Dexter, ‘and, strange to say, the first I met only yesterday in the person of an American lady.’ (Here, by a strange coincidence, occurred an *adagio* passage in the music.) ‘She, in fact, is one of my parishioners, and quite a charming young lady, too’ (here came a *pianissimo*-phrase of the melody), ‘and an artist.’

‘An artist!’ said Smythe, excitedly; ‘you don’t tell me so! I came to Europe to find an artist—what is her name?’

‘Somers—Mary Somers.’

The music had died down by this time to a mere murmur.

‘Somers! Wasn’t it Summerfield?’

‘No.’

‘You are quite certain?’

Here the nocturne abruptly ended.

‘What are you boys talking about?’ said Lottie, wheeling round upon her stool. ‘I heard something about a young lady, I am sure.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Dexter, laughing. But before he could proceed further, the butler

opened the door and requested his attendance, at Mr. Cadmus' desire, in the dining-room. When he had gone, Lottie turned with unusually red cheeks to her cousin, and demanded :

‘What lady was that you were talking about, Master Charles?’

‘Oh, Lottie!’ said Smythe, seizing her by the hand, ‘you are in love with that Dexter.’

‘You stupid fellow!—I am not; but come, tell me the lady's name, that's a dear.’

‘Well, turn about is fair play; if you will tell me where Dexter preaches, I will tell you her name; he is awfully spoony on her, I should imagine.’

‘Oh, Charley!’

‘Yes; it's as serious as that. Where does he preach?’

‘At Deadwick.’

‘Oh! is it far from here?’

‘No; a few miles only. Now, then, what is her name?’

‘Is it easy to find?’

‘Not at all?’

‘And will you show me the way?’

‘Will I? yes; and go with you too. What is her name?’

‘Miss Somers, he says.’

‘Umph! not a very aristocratic name, anyway; but *your* lady-love’s is still worse.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You came to Europe to find Miss Summerfield, you scamp, and not to see your cousin at all.’

‘How did you know that?’

‘I overheard you say so while I was at the piano.’

‘Lottie, you are a daisy, do you know it?’ this accompanied by an admiring look.

‘What dreadful slang you Americans do use; but tell me, have you any idea that this lady is the one you are in search of?’

‘If it is,’ said Smythe, straightening himself up, ‘I’ll punch the Reverend Mr. Dexter’s head if he comes in my way. Do you hear me, Lottie?’

‘Oh, Charley, you are *such* a dear; just knock him right down, if you find him with her, won’t you, please?’

‘Providing it’s the right girl, understand.’

‘Y-e-es—oh yes. It would be such a *lesson* to him, Charley.’

‘I’ll just do it; and if he wears a poor man’s plaster on his chest, and a bit of arnica

plaster on his nose for a week afterward, don't blame me, Lottie !

'Dear boy! and now I'll play you "Yankee Doodle" for that;' and she did.

CHAPTER XII.

MARTHA IS SURPRISED.

MR. CADMUS went to London by the 2.15. train the following afternoon. Strange to say, Charley Smythe and Lottie, who accompanied him to the station, gave, both of them, a sigh of relief as they saw the train glide away from the platform.

‘Now for Deadwick!’ cried the former, exultingly. ‘It was awfully kind of uncle to take me to his club and introduce me to a lot of nice old gentlemen, you know, Lottie, and the factories were very interesting and instructive, and all that sort of thing, this morning, but of course it’s only natural that a fellow should be anxious to look into this Deadwick business as soon as possible.’

This he explained to his cousin as he hurried her through the booking-office and into the

street, while she, with an equal show of alacrity, volunteered her escort at once.

‘At least,’ she added, ‘I will point out the nearest way to the village; I don’t think I will accompany you *this* time, Charley; I had better wait, I think, until you make your report.’

He warmly acquiesced—it may be for personal reasons—in this decision.

‘You see,’ he remarked, in quite a conclusive tone, ‘if it should prove to be the wrong girl, why, then it would be deuced awkward and uncomfortable for both of us, you know, Lottie.’

They crossed the main street, threaded a snarl of alleys and by-ways, and in a very few moments emerged from the somewhat dingy purlieus of the Limeborough rolling mills. A long expanse of meadow now lay before them; on the left a line of pollard willows marked the course of the river, which, flowing through the southerly district of the town, had more than once, in rainy seasons, found its way into the areas and cellars of the poorer inhabitants. It was a dismal prospect. The last lingering verdure of autumn had been fatally stung by the frost. The grass lay prone and blackened, and what little

colour remained was now absorbed by a lurid sky, which had apparently toppled down upon the horizon and extinguished, in mist and darkness, every sign of human habitation in that direction.

‘Where on earth, Lottie, are you bringing me?’ asked Smythe, at last, with an astonished look at the fen-like waste before him. ‘This looks like the New Jersey salt marshes.’

Lottie stopped and pointed to a narrow path which opened into the meadows at their feet.

‘That is your way,’ she said ; ‘it is shorter by half a mile than the main road. Follow it until you come to a bridge, and when you have crossed that, you will see Deadwick in the distance. You could see the church tower—a square one—from here, but for the mist. You cannot possibly go astray. It is the only village there is between here and the Stubbleshire hills.’

‘Will you not accompany me a little farther?’ he asked.

‘No ; it is dreadfully cold and bleak in the meadows to-day,’ she said, shivering ; ‘and there is really no necessity for my going farther. Now, remember, Charley,’ she added, holding up her finger in a monitory

manner, 'what I want particularly to know, is, whether Dexter is in the habit of calling upon this mysterious young person.'

'And so do I, never fear.'

'Well, hurry back then, and *au revoir*.'

She turned once or twice and shook her hand at him as he trudged through the meadow; then he saw her disappear behind an angle of garden wall. It *was* bitterly cold; there was but little wind, but such as there was came in little stinging gusts, that pricked his face and ears, and caused him to turn up his coat-collar before he had proceeded a hundred yards. The pools of water that lay in his path were frozen solid; marshy places were sufficiently toughened to bear the strain of an elephant's tread; the path itself was rough and uneven—being paved, here and there, with scoriæ from the neighbouring ironworks; in spongy and soppy places indentations of hob-nailed boots were firmly set by the frost—and proved destructive to American shoe-leather.

'Hang it!' said Smythe, as he came in sight of the bridge at last. 'If I don't believe Dexter has led me on a wild-geese chase! Marty never would come and live in such a dismal swamp as this, *I'm* sure.'

The bridge was very old, and very narrow, and was traversed by a cross-road which terminated in a broad thoroughfare or causeway, a few hundred feet beyond. Smythe stopped a moment, and looked over the parapet. On either side stretched the pollards, a double line of macrocephalus monsters, with all their twigs streaming like hair in the wind. Below, a dull leaden glaze was upon the river, and his coming frightened away a magpie, who was hopping about and croaking his amazement upon the frozen surface. Upon the edges lay a sort of efflorescence, where the water, lapping up among the sedges, had frozen in flakes, or a froth of tiny crystals ; but farther out, the river had laid a hand of iron upon every one of its reeds and grasses.

‘Pooh ! and *that* is what they call a river in this country,’ said Smythe in some disgust, as he resumed his walk.

It is a curious fact, worthy to be noted parenthetically, that Americans, as a rule, appear to regard Niagara Falls, the Mississippi, and the big trees of the Yosemite, in the light of personal achievements, and the direct fruits of Republican institutions. In a similar sense, hippopotami, elephants, and

gorillas, should rank high in the appraisements of future African development.

As Lottie had predicted, a congeries of roofs and gables in the near distance became visible at once when he reached the causeway. This was reassuring, and he pushed on at a quicker pace. He stood aghast, however, when he entered the village. It was his first acquaintance with thatched cottages, and it may be that his mind, by an incongruous association of ideas, reverted to a certain French villa in Perth Amboy with which our readers are familiar.

‘Look here, old man,’ he said, stopping short in his walk, and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets; ‘you have just been done for by that, Dexter—that’s what’s the matter with you. Marty Summerfield doesn’t live in this cemetery, you bet!’

Just at this point a moving figure came in sight. It was that of a woman, and was rapidly approaching.

‘Hallo! here’s a resurrection, at all events!’ exclaimed Smythe, cheerfully resuming his walk. ‘She may be the only live person in the place. I’ll ask her if she knows Miss Somers.’

The woman advanced very quickly.

‘Perhaps it’s Marty herself,’ he began, when he immediately scouted the idea. ‘Too tall for her,’ he said, ‘too—well! I’ll be——’

The woman had passed him. He had been upon the point of accosting her, when, obtaining a full view of her face, he was struck ‘all of a heap,’ as he afterwards expressed it, with astonishment.

‘I’m darned if it ain’t Parker!’ he exclaimed to himself, looking back at the now retreating figure. ‘Well, I guess it’s a good thing she didn’t recognise *me*, for of course Marty *is* here, and now I think I understand her little game.’

By this time he had arrived in front of the brewery gate.

‘Whew!’ he exclaimed, ‘that’s hops! There must be somebody alive in this shanty at all events,’ and he peered in at the open gate.

Whereupon Joe, the Brophy Cerberus, rattled his chain, sprang out of his lair, and invited Smythe, in an untranslatable vocabulary of howls, to examine the quality of his teeth. Smythe, finding a feeble whistle quite ineffectual, tried to curry favour with the brute by calling him ‘Doggy, doggy, old feller,’ when suddenly ‘Dang ye, Joe, lie down there!’ burst forth with the effect of a con-

cussion at his elbow, and looking up, he saw Mr. Brophystanding in the doorway of his office.

‘He’s as gentle as a robin, sir; but he’s always noisy-like wi’ strangers,’ said the brewer apologetically.

‘He doesn’t look at all kind,’ said Smythe, a little dubious about the matter; ‘and he’s got a very queer build about the jaws—not a handsome build, I should say, as dogs go; but, I suppose, he’s a very good breed?’

‘Breed!’ said John — ‘why, his feyther once killed a young man, all by mistake though; for *he* were a gentle un’ too; but this ’ere chap *would* force himsen into t’house o’ a young woman again’ her will. An’ she says, one night, “Joe”—his name was Joe, too—“Joe,” she says, “shake him!” An’ Joe was either rougher wi’ his jaws nor he meant to be, or else mistook his instructions, an’ killed the poor chap. Oh, there couldn’t be no better breed than him, sir!’

‘By George!’ said Smythe, edging off, ‘he *must* be a rattler—and he looks it, too; but, then, he very much dissembles his good nature, don’t you think? And oh, I say, can you tell me whereabouts in this cemetery Miss Somers lives?’

John surveyed him from head to foot before answering.

‘Are you any relation o’ Mr. Perry’s, sir?’ he asked, at length.

‘Hey!—what?’

‘Ay, sir; the gentleman what caught the pike, an’ had him stuffed.’

Smythe, very much muddled, reflected a moment.

‘Wasn’t it a blue fish?’ he asked, as Marty’s fishing experiences burst upon him with the force of an inspiration.

‘Nay, sir, ’twas a pike,’ said John decisively.

‘Well, I suppose you ought to know; perhaps you were there!’ said Smythe in desperation.

‘O’ course I was. I saw him pulled out o’ water wi’ my own eyes; an’ now she’s painting a pictur’ o’ the river for, for——’

Smythe laughed and nodded his head, as much as to say, ‘Well there!—what’s the use? I won’t pretend any longer, I know all about it: go on.’

‘Well, sir, a painting it for your feyther, sir, I take it,’ said John with a knowing wink.

‘Certainly!—*now* you’ve got it. I’m *young* Perry,’ said Smythe, promptly realising the situation; ‘and now, where *is* she?’

‘Well, sir,’ replied John, ‘she is *here*.’

Smythe took a rapid survey of the brewery

yard, the stables, the skurrying fowls, the line of empty beer-barrels, and immediately experienced a sensation as of something giving way within him.

‘Here!’ he gasped.

‘Ay, at least i’ the cottage next door; for you must know that Miss Somers is a tenant o’ mine,’ was John’s complacent rejoinder.

Smythe thanked him; and was about to move away, when he suddenly faced around, and said:

‘Oh, I met a woman coming up the road, a very tall woman.’

‘Wi’ a red shawl?’ demanded John.

‘Yes, and disgusting yellow hair; do you know her?’

‘Know her!’ roared the brewer.

‘Yes; what are you getting excited about? Is she a friend of yours?’

‘Why, dang it, sir! what d’ye mean? That’s my missis.’

‘O Lord! I beg your pardon; you see I don’t like yellow hair. Some folks do—you do, I suppose? But then, pshaw!—that’s nothing. To a real nobby woman, like her, the colour of the hair is *just* nothing at all. Good afternoon!’—and Charley, conscious of having put his foot in it, made a pre-

cipitate retreat in the direction of Martha's cottage.

Having demanded of Katty, who answered his summons, whether Miss Somers was at home, he received an answer in the affirmative, and was straightway shown into the little parlour. Now Katty had a visual acquaintance with Mr. Dexter's legs and Mr. Dexter's umbrella, and therefore felt quite justified in informing her mistress that that reverend gentleman had arrived for the purpose of escorting her to Mrs. Brophy's tea-party. This intelligence threw Marty into a flutter at once.

'Did he tell you that, Katty?' she asked.

'Not zactly,' said Katty evasively; 'but shuah now, what else could he have come fur, Miss Martha?'

'That is so. Well, run down and tell him that I am dressing, and will be with him in a very few minutes.'

Accordingly, five minutes later, she burst into the parlour, with :

'Excuse me, I'm *so* sorry——' then became dumb with amazement, as a very good-looking young gentleman, with a blonde moustache, advanced with outstretched hands

to meet her : 'Charley Smythe ! Is it possible ?' she exclaimed with a gasp.

'Not only possible, but probable. How de do, Marty ?' was the calm rejoinder,

'Gracious goodness ! where *did* you come from ?' she said, accepting his hands, and staring at him still with undisguised astonishment.

'Well,' he answered, 'I was in the neighbourhood, and I thought I would just drop in and ask why you never answer any of my letters. You owe me thirteen now !'

'In the neighbourhood ?' she repeated.

'Yes, Limeborough—and a disgusting town it is too.'

'And who told you that I lived here ?'

'Dexter.'

'Do you know Mr. Dexter ?'

'Of course I do—the brute !'

'You have no right to call him that.'

'Oh, haven't I ! Isn't he going to marry into my family ?'

'Sit down, for mercy's sake. You quite take my breath away ; and you stand there as cool as a cucumber, as stolid as the sphinx, and propound riddles to me ! What has come over you ? You never used to be like this. Age has not improved your manners.

What member of your family, pray, is Dexter going to marry ?

‘I say marry ! I don’t know for certain : I only know that he is awfully spoony on my cousin.’

‘And who is she ?—some disagreeable blonde, washed-out thing—like yourself, I suppose ?’ she retorted quickly.

‘There you go—fizzing right off, like a fire-work ; just as you used to do, Marty. My cousin is a jolly girl—much too good for that Dexter, I can tell you that.’

‘Indeed ! Is she handsome ?’

‘So-so—not half so good-looking as you are, though !’

‘Oh ! Tall, I suppose ?’

‘Y-e-e-s—rather !’

‘Big feet, of course ?’

‘Well,’ looking down at Marty’s, ‘I’ve seen smaller.’

‘Sallow complexion ?’

‘Ah ! I can hardly say that.’

‘A horrible figure, then ?’

‘Now, you *are* out ! I never saw such a——’ he began, when she cut him short with :

‘There, don’t be so enthusiastic ; it’s very injurious to one’s constitution, you know. What is your cousin’s name ?’

‘Lottie Cadmus.’

‘Lottie *what*?’

‘Cadmus.’

‘Dear me! It must be dreadful to have such a name! And she lives in Limeborough! What a coincidence! How long will you remain there?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; it depends; do you propose to remain all winter in this shanty?’

‘Possibly; I cannot tell.’

‘Well, how are you getting on, anyhow? Have you obtained any trace of Mrs. Warren, yet? I suppose something is going on down here. I saw Parker a few minutes ago.’

‘Well, I never saw such a boy,’ said Martha, wheeling round her chair. ‘Pray, where did you see *her*?’

‘Oh, just down the road; she is as long and lean as ever, isn’t she?’

‘Take care—the walls have ears; her husband is not far away.’

‘Yes, I know that,’ said Smythe, quietly. ‘I quite offended the old man, I think, by objecting to the colour of her hair.’

‘What!’ cried Martha, ‘do you know Mr. Brophy, too?’

‘Brophy! Brophy! of course I do. He is the bitter-beer man next door; and his dog’s name is Joe, and his father once ate a man.’

‘ Mr. Brophy’s father ?’

‘ No ! Joe’s father.’

‘ Charles Smythe, you are progressing rapidly, do you know it ?’

‘ Sh—I say, be careful, Marty,’ lowering his voice to a confidential whisper. ‘ I am young Perry here, you know.’

‘ A young idiot, you mean. What gibberish is this about Perry ?’

‘ Why, I want to know : didn’t Perry catch a blue-fish—a pike, I mean—and have him stuffed ?’

‘ Yes—yes,’ said Martha, in a perfect pant of astonishment.

‘ And aren’t you painting a—a, oh, bother ! something for *old* Perry, eh ?’

‘ You quite take my breath away, Mr. Asmodeus. Is there anything else you know ?’

‘ No ; but I am a candidate for fresh intelligence, and I want you to tell me many things, Marty,’ he said, with sudden earnestness. ‘ First of all, I should like to hear just what success you have had in untwisting that Perth Amboy mystery. You see, I came over here on purpose to aid you in the matter—for somehow, I feel mixed up with it, you know ; and now that I have plenty of

time and money, I am anxious to put them both at your disposal.'

'But suppose I do not require any assistance,' she answered, with the slightest possible curling of her lips.

'Don't talk so, and dishearten me at the very beginning, Marty. None of us in this world can afford to despise the good-will of a friend.'

'Ah, good-will is another thing; but you talk of time and money; have you then become rich?'

'Yes, Marty; the poor old governor—God bless him for a dear, kind, old boy who will be no disgrace to heaven, I can tell you!—he's gone at last, and left me all his money. I am sure I didn't need it myself. I wish he could have lived to be a hundred, so as to enjoy it; but what is it they say, "God disposes," isn't it?—and so there it is, you see, and unless I can do some good with it—something for people I *like*, you know—I might as well send it out to buy plug-hats and stand-up collars for the heathen. Now, come, Marty, be a good girl, and tell me all about your plans. You don't know how interested I am—and why shouldn't I be? Haven't we always been like brother and sister?'

‘Yes; but you are not satisfied to remain my brother,’ Martha replied in a gentler tone.

‘I said *like* a brother,’ rejoined Smythe. ‘Why, Marty,’ he added, with a sudden burst of recollection, ‘I can remember you when you were no longer than that,’—holding his arms about two feet apart—‘and *such* a chunk as you were, too; sloshing round in all the puddles on the beach, and dragging out those brutes of horse-shoe crabs by their tails.’

‘And pray how big a chunk were *you* about that time, Mr. Methuselah Smythe,’ demanded Martha, with something of her old brusqueness.

‘Well, I *was* fat in those days, I believe,’ said Smythe, with a laugh. ‘I remember when I used to fall downstairs, my nurse always said, “Let him enjoy himself; he *can’t* hurt the stairs, he won’t wear out the carpet, and it’s good for the dear child’s liver. Let him be.”’

‘How ridiculous! you are just as silly as ever, aren’t you, Charley?’

‘Just,’ he answered, with perfect good-nature.

‘Well, you are a dear old stupid, at all

events. So, now, open your ears, and I will tell you all about it. It's a shame I have never written to you. How many letters am I behind ?'

'Thirteen.'

'What a wretch I am ! You *shall* know all about it, Charley.'

Whereupon she related in detail such particulars of her quest as are now familiar to the reader.

'By George, Marty ! you *were* lucky to find this Parker,' said Smythe, when she had concluded her narrative ; 'but, I say, it's rather rough, eh, on the party with the dog next door ? It would regularly cut him up if that long wife of his were to come to grief, don't you think, Marty ?'

'I am sure it would, Charley,' she answered, 'and I sometimes feel like a great hypocrite in pursuing what, under other circumstances, would be a very underhanded business.'

'Yes, I was just thinking, Marty,' he replied, 'whether it wouldn't be better to go straight to Parker, and say, "Come, Parker, no nonsense, where is my father?" and do it quietly, you know, some day when the old man was here at the brewery. You see, if he is not a bad sort, it would be a shame

to bring any unnecessary trouble upon him.'

'Well,' she answered, 'I am not sure about that. It's a game, Charley, and I do not hold trump cards enough in my hand as yet. Let me once find Mrs. Warren, and *then*——'

'The deuce will be to pay,' suggested Smythe.

'Exactly,' she answered; 'and in the meantime I shall prosecute my inquiries in every direction. I am going to Mrs. Brophy's to-night with that end in view.'

'To-night!'

She looked at her watch. 'Yes,' she said, 'and I must get ready at once. I am invited there to tea; you shall accompany me to the house, if you will—it is on the road to Limeborough.'

Just as she was about to leave the room he said:

'Marty, a single word. Have you known Dexter long?'

It was now too dark for him to notice the sudden rush of blood to her face as she answered:

'No, only since Sunday; why?'

'Oh, nothing; he has called on you *once* then, I suppose?'

‘Nothing of the kind. I was stupid enough to leave my umbrella home on Sunday, and perceiving my dilemma, he graciously escorted me to the door. He has never been inside of this house. Is that satisfactory to your lordship?’

‘Ah!’ said Smythe, exhaling a long sigh of relief; ‘you won’t be gone very long, I suppose?’

‘About five minutes;’ and Martha was about to leave the room again when she suddenly faced around. ‘Oh, I forgot,’ she exclaimed; ‘you said Dexter told you I lived in Deadwick?’

‘Certainly I did.’

‘But how did he know my name?’

‘Oh, he said you were an artist, and your name was Somers—Mary Somers. I guessed the rest, of course.’

‘But there might be a thousand English girls of that name.’

‘Not all artists, though; and then, don’t you see, he told me you were an American.’

‘He really said that?’

‘Well, Marty, appeal to your common sense! Why am I here?’

‘Then he *is* a brute,’ she said to herself, and flounced indignantly out of the room, to Charley’s great amazement.

Ten minutes later they were walking in the direction of Limeborough.

A strong easterly wind was blowing. The air was full of stinging-nettles. Ice-bound puddles snapped now and then, beneath their feet. Their frozen breaths mingled. Suddenly five strokes of a distant bell fell upon their ears.

‘Five o’clock! Is it really possible! Let us walk a little faster, or I shall not arrive in time,’ and Martha quickened her pace; ‘but, I say, Charley,’ she quickly added, ‘look at this fellow, he is surely going to speak to us;’ and she pointed to a man who, at this moment, started up from the river bank and advanced towards them.

The person thus designated stepped up at once, removed his hat, and said, in a tone of perfect good breeding:

‘I beg your pardon, but should I trouble you to tell me where Mrs. Brophy live?’

He was tall, dark and handsome, with a long black moustache and imperial, graceful in person, somewhat threadbare in appearance, and in manners as suggestive of an acquaintance with good society as heel-taps of dead champagne might be of a wedding feast.

Smythe looked at him attentively, while Martha pointed out the way to the Brophy mansion. To the astonishment of both, after bowing profoundly, and once more removing his hat, he turned and walked in a contrary direction.

‘I’ve got it,’ exclaimed Charley, after a moment’s reflection. ‘Have you ever seen that man before, Marty?’

‘Never.’

‘Well, *I* have. He was in Amboy *that very summer*, and I often saw him in the grove with Parker.’

‘Don’t be silly, Charley;’ and her voice, as she said it, slightly trembled.

‘I am not,’ he retorted; ‘and what is more, Marty, I have seen him in your father’s house, and always when your mother was at home alone. *She* was afraid of him, I know, and so was Parker. He is a Frenchman, I believe—*why, what is the matter, Marty?*’

She was shaking all over, and had seized his hand in a fit of nervous apprehension.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered, ‘only I feel frightened somehow. Has he gone, Charley?’

Smythe turned and looked in every direction.

‘Like a rat into his hole—yes,’ said he.

It was quite true.

The pollards were gesticulating wildly upon the river banks ; a sibilant whisper crept over the frozen meadows ; a neighbouring oak, afflicted with the St. Vitus’ dance, went into convulsions as they passed by ; above, the clouds hung curdled in stringy tatters through which, here and there, stars were seen kindling ; the sparkle of a million crystals rose from the hardened wastes, where madrepores of frost were working amid the ooze and slime of gurgling waters ; afar were blinking the lights of Limeborough town ; close now at hand were an iron gate, a long wall of brick, and a partly illuminated house within the enclosure ; but nowhere was the stranger visible. An express-train from London came streaming like a meteor over the causeway, and, for a moment, lighted up Martha’s face.

‘Where *could* he have gone, do you think?’ she asked, pausing by the gate.

Charley wagged his head, and said that he was ‘a duffer at guessing conundrums.’ Whereupon she quickly added :

‘Well, you must go now. This is Mr. Brophy’s house. You have made me dread-

fully nervous, and must run along, like a good fellow. Good-bye. Come and see me to-morrow, if you like.'

Knowing that remonstrance would be useless, he opened the gate for her, shook hands, said 'good-night,' and waited until he heard the clang of the door knocker; then he walked as far as the end of the garden wall, and yielding to he knew not what impulse, seated himself in the shadow of a hedgerow. His reflections were suddenly interrupted, however, by the pit-pat of human feet upon the frozen road. Nearer and nearer came the steps, until a figure appeared in view, passed him, stopped at the iron gate and entered; a moment later he heard a loud knock, followed by the opening and shutting of a door.

'Dexter, by G——!' exclaimed Smythe, passionately, 'and she never told me a word about his being there to-night.'

As he sprung to his feet and struck into the road, he heard a rustling of dry twigs, and saw emerging from the hedge-row the man with the black moustache and imperial, who raised his hat once more, said 'Good evening,' and passed on.

Turning back, Smythe saw him stop at the iron gate, peer a moment into the garden,

then disappear as mysteriously as he had done before.

An hour later, when he unburdened his heart to Lottie Cadmus, he found a ready sympathiser in the person of that excellent young lady.

‘I tell you what it is, Charley Smythe,’ she said to him just before she went to bed that night, ‘you had better buy that plaister you were talking of yesterday, I think, and a little liniment too ; and then see if you can’t break Dexter of this habit before it grows too strong upon him.’

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

MARTHA and Dexter are the only guests this evening. Mrs. Brophy professes to be quite cast down with disappointment at the non-appearance of certain dear friends of hers ; whereas, if the truth were known, she had confidentially told John the evening before, that 'he might have known Mr. Tompkins for fifty or a hundred years, for all she cared ; she would *not* have that pudgy Mrs. Tompkins sitting at *her* tea-table, dropping her h's, and exposing her ignorance before company ; no, not if she died for it she wouldn't.' Martha thinks it would be just as well to wait a few minutes, and see if these dear friends would not yet put in an appearance, but Mrs. Brophy is clearly a species of domestic martinet, who permits no consideration of friendship to swerve her from

established rules, so, with a jocose allusion to city folk and five o'clock teas, she leads the way into the dining-room. Sally-lunns and bohea are little conducive to conviviality, and though John does his best in the *rôle* of a cheerful Amphitryon, and Mrs. Brophy develops unexpected saccharine qualities of speech, the meal passes without the occurrence of any noteworthy incident. Martha is a little *distract* at first, and answers questions somewhat at random, such is her desire to take in every feature and detail of the room; it being possible, she thinks, that she may discover upon the walls, or in the furniture, some missing piece of the puzzle she is now so confident of being able to put together.

The drawing-room—to which, with the exception of Mrs. Brophy, they all shortly repair—offers a much wider field for investigation, though she is conscious of nothing at first but a sudden kaleidoscopic burst of colour from wall, carpet and furniture alike. Mrs. Brophy evidently does not believe in *nuances*; it is possible that she accepts without a question the authority of the rainbow upon the subject, epitomizing her faith in the same in a table-cloth which

exhibits in broad zones all the hues of the solar beam. Martha next perceives a huge mantel-glass, reflecting the works of a French clock, and a bronze copy of the universal Castor and Pollux ; a row of cataleptic faces in gorgeous frames ; and a landscape—obviously of home production—in which the divergence of everything from the perpendicular gives an unmistakably drunk-and-incapable appearance to a disreputable group of Italian steeples and Lombardy poplars. She has just fixed her wandering eyes upon a full-length portrait over the piano, of John in the character of Scaramouche, when her attention is diverted from the hideous caricature to the movements of her host, who, disappearing at this moment behind the drapery of a bay window, is about to close the blinds. This, it occurs to her, is a good opportunity to address a few words to her clerical neighbour. She therefore draws her chair quite close to the centre table, and bending over it, says in a low voice, and with an abruptness that surprises him :

‘ Are you as truthful as you are charitable, Mr. Dexter ?’

‘ Equally so, I think ; why do you ask ?’ is his rejoinder.

‘Oh,’ she says, looking down, and gently tapping the leg of the table with her foot; ‘I was thinking about your promise to me on Sunday, that was all; of course, it would be very unjust in me to suspect that you would violate it in any way, wouldn’t it?’

He colours a little as he recalls his conversation with Smythe, and is about to admit his indiscretion, when he reflects that, owing to the very small chance of its ever becoming known to her, he might as well lay claim to as much virtue as she is willing to concede to him; so he contents himself with simply answering:

‘Certainly, very unjust.’

Her next words are a surprise to him:

‘You are acquainted with Miss Lottie Cadmus, I believe?’ she says, raising her eyes from the table and fixing them upon his.

The colour grows deeper upon his face as he answers:

‘I am.’

‘A very nice girl, I am told?’

‘Yes.’

‘And rich?’

‘Yes, very rich.’

There is an instant’s pause, during which he appears to await further interrogations; then

he breaks the silence by asking, in an uneasy tone :

‘ Who told you that——’

‘ That you were to marry Miss Cadmus ?’ she interposes, with a malicious laugh.

‘ No, not that ; because it is not true,’ he answers in some confusion ; ‘ but who informed you that I was *acquainted* with Miss Cadmus ?’

‘ Her cousin.’

‘ An American ?’

‘ Decidedly.’

‘ What is his name ?’

‘ His name ?’ she repeats. ‘ How do you know it is a *he* ?’

His face seems a reflection of the crimson furniture, and deepens every minute. He merely repeats his question by way of answer.

‘ If you exact of me the formality of mentioning a name with which you are already acquainted, have it then by all means,’ she replies : ‘ it is Smythe — Mr. Charles Smythe.’

‘ Ah ! yes — I see !’ he rejoins, visibly brightening up ; ‘ *now* I understand. You are the artist he is in search of, and your name is Martha Summerfield and not Mary Somers ?’

Biting her lips, she glances about the room in some alarm before replying; then she says, with a touch of asperity in her voice: 'At all events, you promised to respect my incognito, and have failed to do so; circumstances which you would be bound to respect, were you familiar with them, make it almost a sacred duty for me to conceal my name for a time. Will it be necessary for me to make a second appeal to your judgment and discretion——?'

She has got thus far, when John, who has closed all the blinds and adjusted the fire, returns heavily laden with decanters from an incursion into the dining-room, and throws himself with a thud into an easy-chair by her side. She has just time to perceive that Dexter, by a movement of his finger to his lips; intends to convey to her the assurance that thumb-screws would be powerless to wrench and twist her secret out of him, when John, leaning his arms upon the table, and displaying a face impregnated, as it were, with the slyest and dryest of humour, holds forth in this wise:

'Well, miss, I must say I've seen a many worse lookin' young gentleman nor——' here he gives her a look, meant to be very arch, and winks at Dexter.

‘Than whom?’ cries Martha, facing round with a look of consternation, as she realises what a beautiful *contretemps* is in store for her.

‘Why, Mr. Perry o’ course,’ returns John, with great unction; ‘you see, miss,’ he continues with undiminished zest, ‘I heard Joe a yelping an’ a rattlin’ o’ his chain, an’ I says to mysen, “There’s strangers here about!” says I, knowin’ as how a stranger couldn’t go a nigh Joe wi’out his losing his temper immediate; for I’ve a mind that Joe’s fond on a bit o’ a man’s leg now an’ then; for there’s no accounting for the tastes o’ brutes, by what *I’ve* been able to make out, and he generally takes his bite out o’ strangers if he gets a chance; so I opens the door an’ says, “Lie down! ain’t you ashamed o’ yoursen, Joe?” and then I see a good-looking young gentleman, who spoke me fair, and asks, says he, “Can you tell me where Miss Somers lives?” an’, just for a bit o’ a lark, I says, “Ay, I can, an’ I knew your feyther, Mr. Perry, an’ I saw him catch it wi’ my own eyes——”’

‘Catch what?’ says Dexter, in quiet desperation.

Martha has been conscious, for a minute

past, that the pupils of Dexter's eyes were dilating wider and wider as John proceeded. Knowing that fresh complications must be the issue of it all—she is afraid to look up as yet, but she thinks : 'Oh that miserable pike! and this is what comes of being a liar !'

'Catch what ?' repeats John, leaning back in his chair and shaking with laughter ; 'just hear the parson now—an' don't he really know, Miss Somers ?' he asks, suddenly checking his mirth, and turning a very inquiring face toward Martha.

'I most solemnly asseverate that I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about,' says Dexter earnestly, looking from one to the other.

It would seem that he is not to be enlightened upon the subject, either, just at present, for Mrs. Brophy, warm from an altercation with her cook, appears at this moment with a profusion of apologies, and straightway enters into a long disquisition upon the 'contrariness' of servants in general. When this conversational stream has run dry, a broader duct is opened up by the production by John of the wonderful brick from Tusculum.

'You must have travelled a great deal, Mrs. Brophy ?' says Martha, when the pre-

cious relic has been restored to its place in a glass-case.

‘Oh, *comme ça*,’ rejoined Mrs. Brophy, jauntily, clearly wishing it to be inferred that she might impart valuable information as to the proper circumnavigation of the globe if she felt so disposed.

‘You do yourself an injustice, I am sure,’ ventures Dexter, in a tone of gentle deprecation; ‘you have the reputation of being a very great traveller!’

Mrs. Brophy simpers a little at this point, and John takes up the parable in the interest of the Brophy establishment.

‘Why, Lord bless us!’ he exclaims, ‘the misses’s been!’—here he pauses breathless before the possibilities of the case—‘she’s been!’ he continues, struggling with his geographical recollections—‘been to Liverpool, France, Californy, America——’

‘To America, indeed!’ exclaims Martha, turning to Mrs. Brophy for a corroboration of the fact.

‘Ay, that she has,’ pursues John; ‘an’ee needn’t blush now, Lyddy; you’ve done it now, you know you have—an’ fine tales you’ve told me, too, about the goin’s on in America! They’re mostly black over there, I

hear!"—he continues in a didactic manner, looking first at Martha and then at Dexter—"an' I'm told, too, they sell all the babies an' th' old women, an' eat their tobacco i'stead o' smokin' it, like Christians, in a pipe!"

'Nonsense, John,' says Mrs. Brophy, with a sudden tartness of tone; 'you *do* make such an *olla podrida* of things you are told; you are simply dreadful.'

'Ay, I dare say; I would na dispute your word,' he answers meekly; 'but sure you told me a rare tale about a female who leaped across a river as was bilin' an' fizzin' with cakes o' ice, o' purpose to prevent her baby being put up for sale like a Christmas goose. Am I right, or am I not? Aha!' he adds, as Mrs. Brophy hesitates, 'you canna deny that now.'

'I have read of that incident myself in "Uncle Tom's Cabin,"' says Dexter, exchanging an amused look with Martha.

'*Did* you now!' exclaims John, with great eagerness; 'and was the baby a black un or not? Tell me that.'

'Oh yes, certainly it was black.'

'There now, what did I tell 'ee?' he says, facing round to Mrs. Brophy, and tapping

her victoriously on the shoulder. ‘*Do* I know a thing or two, eh, Lyddy?’

And now, with his usual fatuity, he opens the album upon the table, as if inspired by a sudden thought, and hastily turns over its pages.

‘What do you want with that album?’ asks Mrs. Brophy, with considerable testiness of manner.

‘I was a-lookin’ for a pictur,’ says John, still turning over the leaves. ‘Ah, here ’tis,’ he adds, pushing the book over to Martha; ‘tell me, now, what you think o’ that pictur.’

Martha is conscious of turning very white, and of giving a great start, as she recognises in it a fellow of the one she has so long carried suspended from her neck. Mrs. Brophy has evidently perceived some traces of perturbation in her manner, for she abruptly says:

‘Do you know that lady, Miss Somers?’

‘Oh dear no.’

‘Have you ever seen her?’

‘I am sure not, but I perceive that you noticed my agitation upon seeing this picture, and I will frankly tell you the reason,’ says Martha with great decision, for she has resolved, in this not unlooked-for conjuncture,

to act with boldness and vigour. 'I find in it a most striking resemblance to a friend of mine,' she continues; 'a *marvellous* resemblance, I might say. May I ask,' she adds, turning with an uneasy smile to Mrs. Brophy, 'who this lady is?'

'Why, a cousin o' the missis,' says John, holding the photograph admiringly up to the light; 'an' eh! my word, she *is* a good-looking un too!'

'Oh, I see, a relative; her name is not Burke then, of course?' and Martha shrugs her shoulders, as much as to say, 'Well, I must give it up, I suppose: still, it *was* a very great coincidence indeed.'

'No,' answers Mrs. Brophy, 'her name is Warren, and we travelled together for several years.'

'Indeed! and this picture, by the way, I see, was taken by Gurney of New York,' says Martha, bending once more over the album.

Mrs. Brophy suddenly changes colour, and looks suspiciously at Martha.

'Have *you* ever been to America, Miss Somers?' she asks.

Dexter awaits her answer with manifest anxiety.

‘Yes,’ she replies, ‘I visited it when I was quite a child.’

Mrs. Brophy’s lips tighten, and her next words have a compressed sound, as of having been tightly squeezed in their delivery.

‘Did you travel about much while there?’ she continues.

‘Very little, I think.’

‘Of course you visited all the watering places?’

‘Perhaps; it is quite impossible for me to say.’

At this point a servant appears—much to John’s satisfaction—with glasses, hot water, sugar, and a lemon. Mixing grog is John’s particular function in the domestic economy, and he intends to come out uncommonly strong this evening in the preparation of a whole series of stirrup-cups. He is calling to the servant for a knife, with which to slice the lemon, when a loud knock at the front door for a moment arrests his attention.

‘Go, Mary, and see who ’tis,’ he says.

They all listen for the return of the servant. Obviously Dexter and Martha should feel no interest in the matter. It is equally obvious, however, that they *do* feel a very great interest in the matter, indeed. The loudness of the

knock has probably inspired this feeling. Just what has made Mrs. Brophy turn so deathly pale, though, it would be difficult to determine. The servant is gone but an instant; standing just within the door, with the knob in her hand, she says:

‘A gentleman, please, to see the mistress.’

‘Me! are you sure?’ cries Mrs. Brophy, with something very much like a gasp.

‘That canna be,’ interposes John; ‘*I’ll* see what he wants,’ and he moves towards the door for that purpose, when his wife restrains him.

‘Wait one minute, will you, please?’ she says, with a painful effort to obtain her self-control; ‘the gentleman asked to see *me*! What is he like, Mary?’

‘He’s a moustache, mum, as black as your ’at, and a bit of twisted whisker on ’is chin as is a wonder to look at.’

‘Sit still,’ she says to her guests, with a ghastly attempt at a smile, ‘I will return in an instant. Go on, John, and have the whiskey ready by the time I come back.’

They comply with her injunction as to sitting still to the very letter. Dexter ventures on the remark that ‘there are a great many tramps on the road at this time of the year,’

to which John assents with a grunt, as he fills the glasses with hot water and proceeds in a very perfunctory manner to the concoction of his favourite toddy. Martha, recalling the man she had encountered that evening, is benumbed by some strange terror, and simply listens. A minute passes—the French clock ticks loudly upon the mantel-shelf, cinders rattle down upon the fender, a clatter of knives comes up from the kitchen ; another minute passes, then John rises, and merely looking at his guests in a significant manner, approaches the door and peers into the hall—it is empty, and the front-door is closed. Now thoroughly alarmed, he strides through the passage, throws the door wide open, and gazes into the darkness. There is nobody upon the steps—the garden is an impenetrable void ; he descends to the path and calls ‘Lyddy’ several times in loud tones, which has the effect of bringing Martha and Dexter at once to the open door. He then proceeds further down the path, carefully feeling his way as he advances ; and at last, close by the iron-gate, he stumbles over some obstacle and falls headlong into a flower-bed.

‘Bring a light!’ he cries, scrambling to his feet.

Lighted candles appear at the door, only to be whipped out by the wind, which is screaming and tearing through the garden. Dexter now comes groping his way down the path, and meets John cautiously advancing with a mass of fluttering drapery in his arms.

‘‘Tis the missis!’ he exclaims in a troubled tone, ‘an’ God knows what has happened to her.’

More lighted candles flutter around the doorway, and illumine the limp body as it is carried up the steps and into the passage by the strong arms of the Deadwick brewer. Into the garish and vulgar drawing-room he carries her as he would a child, and lays her tenderly upon a sofa.

She soon recovers; she has merely fainted; she sits up after a time and sips hot whisky out of a spoon in a manner distressing to see, such is her pallor and her feebleness; such is the terror that still lingers in her wandering looks. But who could this strange visitor be who knocked so boldly and so loud? A tramp, Mrs. Brophy affirms—and keeps repeating with great insistence—a tramp who threatened her life, and terrified her into a swoon. Ay! but how came she by the gate? John repeatedly

asks, to which she can only reply that she must have been dragged thither for purposes of robbery, and adduces as a proof of this the fact, that her purse is now nowhere to be found. It begins to dawn upon John at last that but for his opportune appearance at the front-door, Mrs. Brophy would have been dragged to the river's bank and drowned. Martha, who has been thinking much about the stranger with the black moustache and imperial, finds it destructive to John's theory that the river at the present moment is fast locked in ice and ill-adapted to drowning purposes. What Dexter thinks about the matter it would be hard to determine. From his conversation as he accompanies Martha to the cottage, we should imagine that Messrs. Perry and Smythe hold at present the uppermost place in his thoughts.

‘An awfully jolly girl that,’ he said to himself, on his way back to Limeborough; ‘but I wonder who Perry can be, and what all this mystery is about? However, I *like* her, and she likes me, I am sure, and if she should chance to have any money, and be unencumbered with meddling relatives, why, who knows!—I’m not committed to Lottie, and he wings of that conceited young American

need clipping badly. And I think, Tom, you can do it for him too, without half-trying. Anyhow, a jolly girl like that, with a reasonable amount of money, and the chance of getting out of that confounded pulpit, is worth thinking about, old fellow,' which glimpse into Mr. Dexter's mind will render intelligible much that is to follow in the course of this narrative.

CHAPTER XIV.

HANSOM AND FOUR-WHEELER.

THE events of the evening made a deep impression upon the mind of Martha Summerfield, and it was owing, without doubt, to the somewhat perturbed condition of her thoughts, that for an hour or more after retiring to rest she could not sleep. She tried very hard to believe that, first and foremost among these events, was the revelation of the photographic album. Thereby, Mrs. Brophy's complicity with the Perth Amboy mystery was established beyond a doubt. She had fully anticipated this result, having entered the house that evening with a strong conviction that she would, then and there, by some chance, discover the missing link in the chain of evidence, with which she hoped soon to entangle the feet of her yellow-haired hostess. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been a

pleasant thought that, within the space of a single week, she had made such satisfactory progress in the prosecution of her quest ; but the consoling reflection was marred, to some extent, by the unlooked-for and somewhat startling appearance of a stranger, who, if Charley Smythe could be relied upon, had in a moment introduced a new and perplexing element into the whole affair, and become, in short, the unknown quantity of the problem she was so eager to solve.

Smythe's words had been verified, so far as Mrs. Brophy was concerned, in a most signal and dramatic manner. She could not for an instant doubt that the stranger, either as a lover or a relative, had played some part in the sinister events which had cut her adrift from family moorings and cast a sable shadow upon the fair Summerfield name. But what would have been otherwise a simple complication of a partly elucidated enigma, now assumed the guise of a grisly suspicion that her mother's character might not be altogether free from stain. Had not Smythe solemnly affirmed—and his honesty she had not the slightest reason to doubt—that this stranger was upon such a familiar footing with her mother as to point to the existence of a secret

intelligence between them ? And was she to accept this as an explanation of the furtive teardrops she had so often detected upon her mother's face ? Was it of this stranger that she intended to speak upon her death-bed, when the last gasp came all too soon, and forbade her further utterance ? No, no ; she would struggle against such a thought as that. But stop ! he might have been a relative, needy and importunate—a brother, perhaps, for he had the air of a foreigner ; he spoke with a French accent, and it was more than possible she might have had kinsfolk in her native country of whom she had never found it necessary to make mention to either husband or daughter. That were a question, at all events, well worthy of investigation. She must needs redouble her vigilance. She had as yet attacked but a feeble outpost of a possibly formidable enemy. She felt, indeed, that she had given way to too much levity in these latter days. Had she not wasted an appreciable amount of thought upon this Dexter—this chance acquaintance—who was shortly to be married, and who had treated her so ill in betraying her incognito ? But then he could have meant no harm, after all, she reflected, yielding to the spirit of con-

donation which pervades every member of her sex.

He was obviously sorry for his indiscretion, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred would have been no indiscretion at all; for how could he have conjectured that this newly-arrived Yankee was a friend of hers, and had been a lover from the day of their first meeting.

Poor Charley! Their meeting was indeed strange coincidence. Of course she scorned his offer of time and money, for had she not plenty of both? and for that matter, had she not a somewhat contemptible opinion of Mr. Smythe's capacity for solving recondite problems? He was a dear, good, kind fellow, though, and she could not help liking him. It was really something, after all, to know that he had crossed the Atlantic on purpose to see her again. She could not help feeling that he was a true and unselfish lover, even if he did annoy her so, and she sincerely wished that she might make a suitable return for all his devotion. What she had written to Mr. Palmer about his being fond of Mrs. Warren was very absurd, of course. Like all other boys of a certain age, he had been flattered by the attentions of a handsome

woman much older than himself, that was all; and conscious of her power over Charley Smythe, Martha laughed outright at the idea of his falling seriously in love with any other woman. Then it occurred to her that it would be as well to run up to London and have an interview with Mr. Palmer. The time had clearly come when she must decide upon a further course of action. She had her own ideas upon the subject, of course. She had carefully noted the look of alarm upon Mrs. Brophy's face when the identity of the photograph was under discussion. To confront her now, and demand the truth, as Smythe had counselled, would be a most absurd procedure, and if Mr. Palmer himself were to suggest such a thing, she would certainly decline to follow his advice. To tell the exact truth about Martha, she had sat at the feet of Mr. Wilkie Collins just long enough to form a most favourable opinion of her own amateur detective qualities. A circuitous road had its attractions for her; to successfully thread a maze was much more exciting than the prosaic method of knocking at a street door and boldly entering a drawing-room with a demand for explanations. To be clever and *rusée*, and entrap a victim in

a deftly prepared snare—this was her method of probing mystery and guilt.

Still, it would not be amiss to see Mr. Palmer, and listen to whatever suggestion he might be pleased to make ; and since Charley Smythe evinced such a desire to be useful, she would gratify his wish and ask him to accompany her ; she would thereby be able to learn more about Dexter and Miss Cadmus. Dexter had denied there was any engagement between them, or words to that effect. Was it possible that he had spoken of her—Martha—in a way to awaken Charley's jealousy and resentment, and prompted the latter to retaliate in the way he did ? Ah ! she would certainly go up to London by the first train in the morning, and contrive in some manner to send word of her intentions to Smythe ; and as this necessitated rising with the dawn, she resolved to think no more and go to sleep, which she did accordingly.

When she again opened her eyes the night-light had expired. Day had not yet broken, but a wasting moon threw a few tarnished threads of silver upon the casement, by means of which she was enabled to look at her watch and ascertain the time. Then, after calling Katty, she proceeded to make as

careful a toilette as was consistent with candlelight and the state of the thermometer ; and at last, without waiting for Katty's dilatory cup of tea, she opened the cottage door, which, flew back with a slam that sent Joe bouncing with a loud yelp from his den in the brewery yard ; then, as she felt the stinging air upon her face, she gave a hasty glance up and down the road, covered her mouth, from which a cloud of steam arose, with her muff, bent down her head, and walked briskly off in the direction of Limeborough town. Joe's voice was deficient in quality, if it was not in quantity, and as a voice Martha did not admire it at all, but she would now have preferred a running accompaniment of howls to the utter desolation of that early morning hour. The dark cottages, the smokeless chimneys, the ghostly little gardens filled with blackened cabbage-stalks, the strange weird light over everything, were all features of a solitude which struck a chill to her very heart. The wind had fallen, and except an occasional chatter of dry twigs in the hedges, no sound came to her ears but the steady crunching and grinding of frozen earth beneath her tread.

‘ God bless the cock that will wake up and

crow ! she exclaimed, as she found it growing darker every minute ; but the Deadwick cocks, being under no necessity to catch early trains, slumbered tranquilly on, while the moon, which had lost its lustre, and had for several minutes been feebly glimmering upon the crest of the western hills, dropped suddenly out of sight, and a great wave of darkness swooped down upon the land. It was dreary enough work now, and she began heartily to repent of her folly in choosing such an hour for her journey ; when, just before she arrived at the bridge, a steel-grey light rimmed the eastern sky, the meadows rose in all their nakedness out of the gloom, and a line of broken and serrated shadows, partly smothered in mist, started up upon the horizon just where Limeborough lay. She now could see sprigs of diamonds nodding beneath the hedge-rows ; great silver webs of frost lying like bridal veils upon the holly-branches ; leaden pools, and frost-baked turf. She paused an instant upon the bridge, and looked down upon the river, which stretched, a zig-zag of dullest zinc, as far as she could see, with a selvage of frowsy ice-locked river weeds, whose brown spires and barren seed-vessels were now

decked forth in all the pomp and glory of Jack Frost's fairy kingdom. Thick clots of vapour, hanging upon the abutments, rose and expanded as she stood, and raising her eyes, she saw curling masses of steam everywhere ascending from the meadows. Then, resuming her walk, she saw, midway to the town, a dingy, dirty red appear at last in the east, heralded by a few threads of gold which were quickly drenched in mist. At last came the sun, a trickling, bleared orb, swaddled in loose vapour, and quickly extinguished by the falling, as of a drop-curtain from the zenith, of a great slate-coloured cloud; so that when she arrived at the town it stood cold and bare and grey, with pinched and wan-looking steeples — every street a cavern, every house a brick-and-mortar phantom—so dead a town, in short, that it seemed to her fancy like an exhumed Pompeii awaiting reburial.

The clang of a church-bell ?

‘Thank God for that!’

A horse and cart ?

It was like getting away from Venice after a six months' acquaintance with that amphibious, million-legged, voiceless ghost of the Adriatic.

Martha's feet pattered lively enough now over the stone pavements. She heard the cart rumbling away in the distance, and though, when the sound had finally ceased, she listened in vain for some other token of the town's awakening, she saw a light flash here and there in the windows of upper chambers; and when at last she turned into the main street, she could have screamed with delight as she saw—close by the church, where the gravestones had awakened into a weird-grey assertion of their right to a share in the general resurrection—a veritable policeman, of whom she straightway inquired the way to the Magpie and Dolphin. Leaving him to chew the cud of astonishment and follow her at a respectful distance, in the interest of morality and the public peace, she turned, a moment later, into the archway leading to the draughty and ill-paved courtyard of the Magpie and Dolphin, and proceeded at once to the coffee-room. Here she found 'boots,' a shock-headed and somewhat disreputable-looking personage, with a strong odour of Day and Martin about him, kneeling, in his shirt-sleeves, on the hearthrug, and blowing, like a dingy Æolus, at a refractory grate. Martha stood quite

beside him before he perceived her presence; then, with a sudden bound, he leaped to his feet, amid a clatter of coal and fireirons, placed a grimy hand upon his breast, and caught his breath.

‘Well, miss,’ he said, ‘I’m blest if you *didn’t* give me a turn. Was you to be called? I’ve just been up to No. 7. Surely, you aren’t No. 7, miss?’ and he looked inquiringly in the direction of Martha’s feet.

‘No,’ she answered, ‘I am not stopping here at all.’

‘Oh, I thought not; because, when I was a shinin’ No. seven’s boots, I see the quantity of blackin’ they took, and measurin’ ’em over with my eye, like, I says to myself, “Them’s thirteens,” I says, “and regular swimmin baths too,” I says; and that’s why I was took aback so, when I see you a standin’ here, and hope you’ll excuse me, miss.’

‘Oh, never mind,’ she said; ‘I am sorry to trouble you, but have you any objection to earning a half crown at this early hour in the day?’

‘An ’arf crown, miss? Well, I never yet *did* turn my back onto an ’arf crown if I could earn it honest.’

‘Very well. Do you know where Mr. Cadmus lives?’

Mr. Cadmus! Boots rather fancied he *did* know where he lived. ‘Why, down to The Elms, o’ course.’

‘If that is so, take this letter there as quickly as possible. If nobody answers the bell, ring it until it is answered, do you hear?’

‘Yes, miss.’

‘Here is your half-a-crown.’

‘Thank you kindly, miss.’

‘Remember about the bell, now.’

‘Never fear. I’ll pull it out by the roots, miss, and if that don’t wake ’em, I’ll just try my heels agin the door, and them heels o’ mine would wake the dead, miss.’

‘Very well. What time does the first train leave for London?’

Boots referred to a time-table upon the wall.

‘At ’arf past eight, miss.’

‘Thanks. Now run along as fast as you can with the note.’

Boots instantly clapped a fearful and wonderful hat—resembling a dead rabbit—upon his head, and bolted through the coffee-room door.

It transpired, in the course of the day, that Charley received her note at exactly a quarter to seven—disturbing him in the act of introducing all the ‘boys’ at home to Mrs. Martha Smythe. Its arrival therefore pleasantly accorded with his waking humour, and induced more or less expedition in the preparation of his toilet. In spite of this, however, Martha was kept waiting for three quarters of an hour at the station, and it was not until she perceived a bustle among the porters and heard the shriek of the approaching train that Charley, very red and blown, bore down upon her with his apology.

‘I just stopped to get a bite,’ he explained, ‘just a *little* bite—and my watch is slow, too. By George, here’s the train! it was a close shave, and no mistake.’

He helped her into an empty first-class compartment, and immediately began to sniff.

‘Whew! it *is* stuffy in this cabin—mayn’t I pull down the window just a moment, Marty?’

She assenting, he dropped the sash, thrust out his head, and as quickly withdrew it again.

‘Marty,’ he said, in a whisper, ‘I believe Parker has got into the train.’

‘Nonsense,’

‘I do, really. I caught but a glimpse of her face, but I’ll bet two to one she’s in the next thing here—what do you call it?’ and he tapped the partition with his finger.

‘Compartment.’

‘Yes, that’s it. I’ll just step out a minute and make sure, though’—which purpose was frustrated by the train’s moving off at the same instant.

‘O pshaw—that’s too bad—but I know I am right. Where is the next stopping place?’

‘At Middleborough Junction.’

‘Very well; and *you’ll* see when we get there; but, tell me, Marty, what is up this morning, anyhow?—you didn’t explain, you know, in the note,’ and Charley closed the window, took a seat opposite to hers, and bent forward a very inquiring face; ‘you only said, “important!” in big letters at the bottom, and that, I take it, means something serious.’

‘Does it? Well, I going to call on my solicitor, that’s all.’

Charley puckered up his eyebrows.

‘Why, that doesn’t make my hair stand on end a bit, Marty.’

‘Don’t be absurd ; here, look at this,’ and she thrust her locket into his hand. ‘Open it ; you know that face, of course.’

‘Oh, just don’t I !—I had trouble enough to get it, I remember. Jove ! she *was* a handsome woman—eh, Marty ?’

‘She was a very wicked one.’

‘Well, I don’t know about that—it’s possible, of course ! but I sometimes have my doubts about her having had anything to do with your father’s disappearance.’

Martha’s eyes suddenly became as big as saucers.

‘You *do* ?’

‘I do.’

‘*You* do ?’

‘Well, don’t get mad and glare at a fellow in that way. I say, I *may* be wrong ; but she certainly was an awfully nice woman——’

‘Because she made a fool of you, and called you a pretty boy I suppose ?’

‘Don’t you make any mistake about *my* being made a fool of in any such way. Looks !’ (and an expression of supreme disgust appeared in Charley’s face) ‘looks ! why, I’d rather be a hunchback or a cripple, so long as my headpiece was sound, than to be the prettiest dandy that ever went dancing

through the world with an empty nut on his shoulders ; that's the sort of man *I* am.'

'I don't believe a word you say. There is no such thing as honesty about your shameful sex. Here you pretend to be my friend, and yet, by your confession, are all the time in love with my father's murderer! Oh, pshaw! I have no patience with such hypocrisy.'

Charley opened his big blue eyes very wide at this unexpected sally.

'There now!' he answered, 'isn't that a little, just a little, bit unreasonable, Marty?'

'No, it's the truth; and you know it.' And she snatched the locket from his hand, closed it with a snap, flounced to the other side of the carriage, deliberately turned her back upon him, and stared out of the window.

This was a serious aspect of the case. Charley stroked his chin in a dubitative manner a moment; then he moved up to her side, and said in a soothing tone:

'By Jove, little girl, I didn't mean to offend you; you may be right, and I may be altogether wrong; and I don't pretend that I *am* right, for I don't know anything about it. All I say is this: you are working entirely in the dark, and if you get reckless and smash

things, and have a heavy bill of damages to pay, it would be almighty awkward—that's all. So don't get mad at me, Marty. Come, turn around, that's a good girl. What were you going to say about that photograph ?'

'Nothing!'—this curtly ; though she once more turned her face to his.

'But you commenced to say——'

'No, I didn't ; and what would *you* have cared if I had.'

'Oh, bosh !'

'Don't swear and lose your temper, and frown in that awful manner ; it's not a bit becoming.'

'Well, why don't you go on, then ?'

'Mercy on us, the impatience of a man ! Well, I saw a photograph just like it in Mrs. Brophy's album.'

'All right ; of course you did. Well !'

'Well, that's all.'

'The end—*finis*—the whole thing ?'

'Certainly ; and I am now going to tell my solicitor about it, and ask his advice.'

'But didn't you get Mrs. Warren's address ?'

'Certainly *not*.'

'You didn't say, "That's the woman I am after. Summerfield my name is, and I came

three thousand miles to find that woman. Come now, Parker, no nonsense ; where does she live ?” ’

‘ I did nothing of the kind. I am not troubled with softening of the brain, Mr. Smythe. ’

‘ O Lord ! ’ and Charley threw himself back with a gesture of extreme disgust.

‘ O Lord !—*what* ? If it pleases his Royal Highness King Solomon the Little to explain——’

‘ Oh, nothing !—you women do things in such a queer way, that’s all ! Why were you not all born men ? ’

‘ For the same reason that mainsprings are not left out of watches ; the world would run down without us. ’

Charley saw the force of the remark, and Martha began to look amiable again.

‘ Now, sir, ’ she went on, ‘ if you promise not to interrupt, I *will* tell you all about it. ’

‘ But I thought you had already done so ? ’

‘ About the photograph, you goose ; that was only a prelude. Now listen ; ’ and she told him all that had occurred at Mr. Brophy’s the evening before.

‘ That’s curious, ’ said Charley, when she

had concluded—‘that’s *very* curious ;’ and he pulled at his moustache and grew reflective. ‘But I say, Marty,’ he added, after a moment, ‘I don’t exactly like the idea of Dexter’s seeing and hearing all this.’

‘Dexter !’ she repeated, affecting a tone of surprise, but colouring deeply — ‘Dexter ! what do you mean ?’

Charley looked disgusted.

‘Now, don’t prevaricate and grow so red in the face about it. I saw him go in at the gate, and you never told me he was going to be there. I don’t call that a bit square, Marty.’

Martha, conscious of detection, flew into a passion at once, as a matter of course.

‘Why should I tell you ?’ and her eyes flashed fire. ‘You are not my keeper ; and upon what authority you constituted yourself shadow in chief of my person I am at a loss to imagine. I am tired of it ; I discharge you. I wish you would leave me alone.’

‘Marty, Marty! don’t forget yourself, that’s a good girl,’ said Charley gently.

‘Forget myself ! Dear me, you are getting person and tense sadly mixed, I am thinking. You forgot *yourself* when you told me yester-

day that Mr. Dexter was going to marry your cousin.'

'Well, isn't he?' exclaimed Charley, catching fire in turn.

'No, he is not.'

'Pooh, pooh!' snapping his fingers, 'who told you that?'

'Mr. Dexter himself!' and Martha smiled victoriously.

'He's a——'

'Stop! no he isn't.'

'Well, if *I* have anything to say about it, he'll be *forced* to marry Lottie.'

'Oh indeed!' and Martha, indulging in a sly little laugh—which Charley found to be very disquieting—threw herself back in the seat, closed her eyes, and affected heavy slumber. He watched her in silence a few moments, and then his patience began to ferment.

'Marty!' he began—when the train slackened; there was a sudden jolt, a roulade of iron taps all along the train as the buffers came in collision, a prolonged scream from the engine, an infernal din of scraping wheels, yelling porters and clanking irons; visible, a grimy interlacement and confusion of flying rods, girders, timbers, semaphores, and lamps;

then a full stop—and the carriage-door flew open.

‘Middleborough junction!’

Charley’s thoughts gravitated back at once to Mrs. Brophy.

‘Perhaps I am wrong about Parker, too,’ he said; ‘but, by George, we’ll just see about that,’ and he was dashing out of the carriage when Martha awoke refreshed, and in a good humour:

‘Oh dear! is it London? I must have been asleep—Middleborough! So it is; and O Charley! run and get me a cup of tea and a sandwich, that’s a good boy.’

This unexpected gleam of sunshine thawed Charley at once. His manner was becoming glacial, or he had meant it to be, at least.

‘Lord!’ he said to himself, ‘*I* shall never be able to make out a woman! Tea and a sandwich! All right, Marty.’

He leaped upon the platform, and as quickly leaped back again and closed the door behind him.

‘Draw the curtain,’ he whispered; ‘hide yourself.’

Martha instinctively obeyed.

‘Mercy on us! what is the matter?’

‘Hush! the man we saw last night is

walking down the platform—he is coming this way. He'll be here in a—'sh—there he is.'

Sure enough, as Eve's daughter applied her eye to an infinitesimal chink in the curtain, the handsome dark face of the stranger came within reach of a breath.

'Auguste!'

The voice, shrilly feminine, came from the next compartment.

Martha held her breath, and widened the rent in the curtain; what she saw surprised her. A yellow-haired woman descended from the carriage, advanced with outstretched hands, and positively kissed the foreign gentleman. The smack was audible to Charley. He turned and looked at Marty. Both smiled and then looked serious. Both adjusted their eyes to their respective points of espial once more, and saw Mrs. Brophy and the foreign gentleman enter the refreshment room.

'Whew'! said Charley.

'Don't mind my tea now; we shall follow them when we get to London,' said Martha.

A short but earnest conference followed—then said Miss Summerfield, abruptly changing the subject:

‘Call that vociferous boy with the brass buttons, Charley, and get a *Telegraph* and a *Graphic*. That will quiet him for a minute or two at least. He has a voice like a steam whistle, and it splits my ear drums ; you can look at the pictures of the Abyssinian war, and I will see how our old peripatetic friend Train is getting on. His martyr’s crown must have received its last thorn by this time.’

‘Do you mean George Francis?’ asked Charley with a grin.

‘Certainly ; he was worse than an earthquake over here in England. The British Empire shook to its very foundations. Strong men trembled. The weaker sex wept and prayed. Yankee Doodle was in the air, and the scream of it went from Land’s End to John O’Groats. The Royal Horse Marines slept in their saddles, and the gunners of the Honourable Artillery went about everywhere with lighted matches in their hands. A big Fenian comet was looked for in the heavens. Dr. Cumming began to preach the end of all things ; dukes began to repent of their sins, and shake hands with hobbledyhoys. It was a *dreadful* and *awful* time, Charley.’

‘Git out with your nonsense, Marty!’ and Mr. Smythe laughed long and loud.

Mr. Smythe was not what you might strictly term an 'American of culture;' still, graduates of Princeton and Rutgers have been known to say '*git*' without the solecism being remarked by auditors capable of windy disquisitions upon the Greek aorist and the differential calculus. Americans are not only adepts in the science of neology, but they play sad pranks at times with established orthoepic rules. Smythe's father, for example, belonged to a New Jersey branch of the Weller family, to whom *v* and *w* were the two Dromios or Corsican brothers of the alphabet, and who, throughout the civil war, invariably spelt victory 'with a wee.'

There was no 'Flying Dutchman' in 1867, but the express trains in those days performed wonders, nevertheless. Charley was quite surprised when Martha, twenty minutes later, looked up from her paper and said :

'Oh ! here is Muswell Hill ! we shall be in London in a very few minutes.'

'I suppose we shall see the tower now, eh, Marty ? and—what is it ? St. Paul's ?'

'What do you know about St. Paul's ?'

'Why, I read all about it in a Sunday-school book ; and there is the Alhambra and the Oxford too.'

‘Charley!’

‘Heavens! what are you looking so black about?’

‘The Alhambra! the Oxford! were *they* mentioned in the Sunday-school book?’

Charley reflected a moment.

‘No-o-o; I think it was a fellow told me about them. But then, I always was a duffer at geography.’

A terrible shriek from the steam devil that had them in tow, a sudden pull up and a responsive scream from every wheel beneath the long cavalcade of carriages, then a porter threw open the door and cried:

‘Any luggage, sir? Want a cab, sir?’

‘Well!’ said Charley, turning to Martha.

‘Get rid of him! we must watch and wait.’

‘All right. I say, old man, here! you git—we don’t want any cab;’ and Charley slipped a shilling into the porter’s hand, which had the effect of redoubling the well-meant impertunity of the latter.

‘A nice four-wheeler, sir? I know the kind *you* want, sir.’

‘Oh, go on, and don’t bother.’

Martha pinched Charley’s arm.

‘There they go! there they go,’ she

whispered, and as a matter of fact, Mrs. Brophy and the stranger at that instant crossed the platform and entered a four-wheeler. 'Now let the porter get us a hansom as quickly as possible.'

The porter had heard—had already darted off.

'Hansom !' he cried, and straightway came bowling down a curious specimen of the cabby genius, who touched his hat to Smythe, and bent down a weather-beaten ear for instructions. He had on what Mr. Sala somewhere calls an 'upper Benjamin,' a wonderful cape, or rather a system of capes which enfolded him in concentric layers like an onion. He had a freshly boiled and rather underdone face, bearing a fine stubble of unshorn beard, and he was detected by Charley in the act of hiding away a disreputable-looking pipe of the clay species as he pulled up his horse.

'Cabby,' said Martha, 'do you see that four-wheeler going toward the gate ?'

'Yes, miss.'

'Follow it, and double fare ; lose sight of it, and I will discharge you at once.'

'Right, miss ;' and with a rather contemptuous look at Smythe, as the 'weaker vessel,' he held up the reins while the twain

entered, then dashed out of the station, across the yard, and slackened up as the four-wheeler turned into Euston Road. Another moment and away they spun as far as Portland Place, and then down to Regent Street where the four-wheeler pulled up in front of a draper's shop, and remained there for twenty minutes :—a tedious enough business, thought Charley, who, even when they were under way again, took a feeble interest in everything, until they entered Trafalgar Square, when he gave a sudden start, his jaw fell, and a strange wild look appeared in his eyes.

‘Don’t look like that, Charley,’ said Martha. ‘What *does* ail you ?—are you ill ?’

‘Good God !’ he exclaimed, ‘what’s that ?’ and he pointed to the top of Northumberland House.

‘That ! Why a lion, of course.’

‘A lion ! But look at his tail !’

‘Idiot ! don’t speak so loud ; the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have offered a reward for the apprehension of the first man that makes another joke about that poor brute.’

‘Joke ! It’s no joke ; and the secretary of that society had better go up and put the poor

beast out of his misery. Why, that lion's tail is *frozen*, Marty—frozen *stiff*!’ and he gazed fascinated at the abnormal creature, until, arrived at Charing Cross, the cab suddenly became entangled in a *dédale* of vehicles of every description, and Charley's attention reverted once more to the business in hand. The four-wheeler was now quite out of sight, and Martha, in her alarm, was about to signal to the driver when the latter suddenly dropped his whip, as an angler might a fly, upon the horse's back, and away they whirled, down the Strand, Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, St. Paul's Churchyard, Cheapside, the four-wheeler now always in full view, until, at the Mansion House, there was a sudden pull up, and the cabby, opening the little trap door in the roof, hoarsely whispered :

‘ The party's stopped at the Bink, miss.’

‘ Have they gone inside ?’ asked Martha.

Cabby took a minute for a true observation, then applied his mouth once more to the opening and said :

‘ You're right, miss. I jist see 'em go in—the pair on 'em.’

‘ Then quick, Charley, and follow them into the long building there on the left, and see what they are up to,’ she said ; ‘ but be

careful; don't let them see you, for the world.'

Smythe was off in an instant. As Martha did not time his absence by her watch, it seemed to her of an unconscionably long duration. Barely fifteen minutes had elapsed, however, when he returned, in some excitement, and leaped into the cab.

'Well!' said Marty.

'Well!' he rejoined, 'Parker is *rich*, that's what's the matter with *her*; and I say, Marty, *what* a bank it is! I couldn't find my way at all at first, and got by mistake into a big garden full of trees. I began to feel worried then, for I couldn't tell in what direction Parker had gone. However, I entered the first door I came to, and found myself in a long room where they were actually scooping up gold in shovels and weighing it like sugar in scales. None of your greasy old green-backs and shin-plasters there, I can tell you.'

'Well, well! and did you see *them*, that is the point,' said Martha impatiently.

'Yes; there they were at a desk, and having a desperate wrangle too it appeared; but at last he walked away, and she took a cheque-book out of her pocket, filled up a cheque,

and presented it at the counter. Perhaps it was a risky thing for me to do, Marty; but *he* had quitted the room, and *she* didn't know me, so I stepped up beside her and said to the cashier, "Will you give me gold for a ten-pound note?" He was counting over some notes at the time, and when he had finished, he handed them over to Parker and said, "Two hundred pounds, mum;" then turning to me he added, "The wrong place, sir; you must go to the issue department." With that I followed Parker out, and saw through the glass door the man standing with his back towards me. She went straight up to him, gave him the roll of notes, and I heard her say as I passed, "That is the last, the very last that you shall ever have, so make good use of it. I don't see how you could expect more of me; if you leave cards alone it will keep you for a year." I didn't wait to hear what *he* said, but walked out into the street and waited—for I saw the old four-wheeler standing there. In a minute or two she came alone; I followed her to the cab and heard her say, "Drive me back to King's Cross, and look sharp about it, too." And now, my lady, removing his hat and bowing with mock

gravity, 'I await your ladyship's further orders.'

'Don't be silly, Charley, and tell the cabman to drive us to 101, Lincoln's Inn Fields.'

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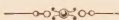
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